

Wild 122

30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

THE SOUTH COAST TRACK
TREKKING IN MONGOLIA
GOURMET BUSHWALKING
PROFILE: LINDA BEILHARZ
STOVE SURVEY
WALKING IN GUY FAWKES
NATIONAL PARK
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'When I first heard the news, I assumed that the reintroduced cattle must be some new breed that doesn't weigh 600 kilograms or that has been crossbred with a kangaroo and bounds harmlessly around on long furry feet.'



The High Country debased for politics

Many years ago, on one of my family's summer visits to the Victorian High Country, we were camped at Wallaces Hut when some horse riders turned up. My little sister was horse-mad at the time and it wasn't long before she was up in a saddle of one of them – apparently the same horse that was ridden by Tom Burlinson in *The Man From Snowy River*. As eldest brother it was my job to lead them around in circles. It was while doing this that the horse – very deliberately I am sure – stepped on my bare foot.

The pain, as the horse slowly transferred its not inconsiderable weight on to my delicate appendage, was excruciating. And for some reason it was that memory that popped into my head recently when I read that the new Liberal Government, led by Ted Baillieu, has decided that once again, after a five-year ban, cattle will be reintroduced into the Alpine National Park. That same pain I so vividly remember is the very reason why cattle were banned in the first place – their hard hooves, so like horses', cause great damage to the soft alpine landscape.

When I first heard the news, I assumed that the reintroduced cattle must be some new breed that doesn't weigh 600 kilograms or that has been crossbred with a kangaroo and bounds harmlessly around on long furry feet. But it turns out this isn't the case. They are the very same cattle that endless scientific studies previously told us were so bad for the alpine environment. So the question is: why have they been reintroduced?

Well, as it happens, it appears that these cattle do in fact have some new, hitherto undiscovered qualities: they can prevent bushfires. And no, they haven't developed enormous bladders and equivalent sized undercarriages to fight the flames, their new superpower is fuel reduction.

Now even I (a certified 'Greenie') will admit that there is a certain logic to this argument; anyone who has visited a cattle farm will know they damage native

vegetation and cause severe erosion – and there is nothing like denuding the landscape to slow a fire down. To prove the efficacy of this newfound talent, our Government has called for its own scientific study.

So it is nestled in the comforting Trojan horse of 'science' that 400 cattle have returned to Victoria's High Country (drawing many comparisons with the Japanese and their 'scientific' whaling program). But the problem with this particular Trojan horse is that it has no legs: there has already been a scientific study carried out on the effectiveness of cattle in fuel reduction. After the fires in 2003, Dr Dick Williams, an ecologist from CSIRO, studied over 100 square kilometres of the Bogong High Plains comparing the burning of grazed and ungrazed areas. To quote Dr Williams: 'We could find no difference [between burnt and unburnt areas], no impact of grazing on the pattern of burning, whether the proportion of country that had been burnt or the severity with which it had been burnt.'

Given the weight of existing scientific knowledge, it is clear that the return of cattle to the High Country has nothing to do with science and everything to do with politics. Shocking as this realisation may be to you, dear reader, the truth is that the Government's pre-election promise to return cattle to the park was all about unseating independent Craig Ingram from the electorate of East Gippsland rather than anything to do with fuel reduction. To help oust Mr Ingram the coalition promised to return cattle to the High Country – a promise that went under the radar of the mainstream media with all the other hot topics going on like Oprah Winfrey's visit, Wikileaks and Shane Warne's inability to remain faithful to Simone for more than five minutes.

Among the many ironies of the return of cattlegrazing is one glorious standout. Back in November at his first press conference as

Premier, Baillieu promised 'There will be no hidden agenda, no spin, no secrecy. Accountability and transparency will be the principles that underpin our government.' While it should come as no surprise to us that politicians do exactly the opposite of what they say, it still comes as something of a shock to learn that the return of cattle to the High Country was shrouded in secrecy, because, as it turns out, it may actually be illegal, meaning the whole act had to be carried out on the quiet. In the *Weekly Times*, former Mountain Cattlemen's Association president Christa Treasure is quoted as saying that cattlemen had been told to keep the news under wraps to avoid an injunction from the Federal Government. This corresponds with the legal advice received by the Victorian National Parks Association: that any plan by the State Government to return cattle to the High Country needed to be approved by the Federal Government first – a process that has clearly been skipped for political expediency.

Cattlemen like to make a lot of their 150-year-long history in the High Country, but the reality is that in the arc of time, their presence, and by that I mean the presence of white people, is insignificant. In many ways, I think *The Man from Snowy River* (and particularly that dastardly horse) has a lot to answer for: it romanticises the relationship between cattle and the High Country and helps justify their continuing presence. But the truth is that cattle have no place in a national park and the reasons for them being there have less to do with 'fuel reduction', and everything to do with politics, sentimentality and greed for a free feed.

If you want to register your protest against cattlegrazing in the High Country, visit vnpa.org.au to find out how.

Ross Taylor
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Wild

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WARNING

The activities covered
in this magazine are
dangerous. Undertaking
them without proper training,
experience, skill, regard to
safety, and equipment could
result in serious injury or death.



*Cover Looking out into
the Capertee Valley from
Pantoneys Crown.
David Noble*

*John Robens looking
towards Federation Peak
at dawn from High Moor
on the Western Arthur
Range, South-west
Tasmania. Noble*



Issue 121, Jan-Feb 2011

SOLO WALKING

It seems strange that the issues of reliance on community rescue services as a back-up failsafe and the relevant costs of providing these services, should surface as a criticism of solo walking or adventure activity. I am not a solo walker and therefore know little of the motivation of those who do, but one thing seems clear, the positive dividend for those who do wander off for a solo walk exceeds the risks. I suspect that those who go for a solo walk do so as an occasional variant of bushwalking with friends. The odd tourist backpacker walking off with little insight into their skill limitations is unavoidable. More naturally, solo walking is self-filtering and undertaken by those who have developed skills sufficient to be able to pin their safety on their self-reliance, with or without supportive technology. It seems very accountable in the main. I suspect that the silent majority of solo walkers enjoy a lifetime of such occasional forays without ever calling for assistance.

Whether the Jessica Watsons et al of this world are seen as heroes of great courage or risk-taking fools lucky to survive, their skills, capability and resolve are extraordinary. It requires a special something and these brave journeys didn't take off opportunistically with the development of EPIRB/sat-phone technology.

With access to a realistic first aid kit, the onsite effectiveness of treatment in a bush crisis, even in trained hands, is very small. The most relevant injuries are skeletal injury to lower limb, head or spine, envenomation or infection. If the medical crisis is stable and time constraints assessed as not critical, even four strong people will struggle to carry a fifth person through the bush for any distance. In this way, the relevance of bushwalking company for safety reasons is largely confined to a non-injured party making a dash to contact the same rescue service an EPIRB will alert, only with an added time delay.

For this reason, in the absence of quick access to vehicle-based evacuation, the most significant safeguard for all walkers is access to an EPIRB or GPS and satellite phone. This potent technology ameliorates

the risk involved but doesn't obviate it and the potential benefit pertains to an injured individual in a group or walking as a soloist. I am unconvinced that the latter are more likely to be needing of its advantages based on predictable differences in bush skills and preparedness. Beyond adding consensual wisdom to navigation and path selection, I believe the 'safety' consideration for those who walk in groups, is largely psychological. Those who only walk in groups could look respectfully toward those who don't. Rather than condemn, it might be more appropriate to appraise more fairly the motivations of such individuals and perhaps look for the benefits they might gain and what inner purpose is served.

Peter Farmer
Tooowoomba, Queensland

THE DINGO

Steve Van Dyck's recent article (*Wild* no 119) about the dingo and its place in the Australian ecosystem deserves a response.

Regardless of whether the dingo originated from Thai animals or arrived here 4000 or 8000 years ago, certain facts are unequivocal. Firstly, just like dingoes, humans – both Indigenous and post-1788 settlers – are a relatively new feature of the Australian continent and the changes we have imposed on the environment are profound and largely irreversible. Similarly with the dingo, it is a new arrival and its presence has led to permanent changes that cannot be undone.

Secondly, in our now heavily modified environment, the dingo provides essential and potentially critical ecosystem functions including control of the introduced fox and feral cat. Without the dingo, these pests would have caused more of our unique animals to now be extinct throughout inland Australia.

Thirdly, Van Dyck fails to differentiate between dingoes and wild dogs. I'm told that wild dogs are far more of a problem in the pastoral regions of Australia than the pure-bred dingo, so management of these two similar but different animals should be focused on wild dogs more than the dingo.

Finally, Van Dyck challenges dingo protagonists to mount a case for the introduction of the dingo into Tasmania now that the Thylacine has become extinct. In fact, with the Tasmanian devil now facing extinction in the wild because of the spread of the cancer-causing virus, dingoes (just like the Thylacine) would efficiently kill most infected devils. In turn, this would limit the spread of the cancer and potentially overcome the extinction threat currently faced by the devil. This is ecosystem engineering at a grand scale and could not be justified except

after exhaustive scientific trials. Nonetheless, as has been shown by removal of top-order predators elsewhere in the world, impacts throughout an ecosystem can be unexpected and profound when a seemingly undesirable species is reduced or removed from an ecosystem.

The dingo is a part of our natural environment whether we like it or not. The challenge is to fully understand its actual and potential impacts, both positive and negative. Van Dyck's article does not go far enough in alerting your readers to the bigger and more complicated picture that needs to be fully understood when considering the fate of the continent's top order predator.

Bernie Masters
Capel, Western Australia

30 YEARS OF WILD

In 1981 I was in my final year of my Physical Education degree when I came across a scrappy little note on the notice board at college that basically said that Chris [Baxter] and others were starting up this mag and needed support, and that if you were interested in the outdoors you should subscribe to help get the project off the ground.

I didn't have any money at the time, but I thought it was worth supporting as there was really nothing out there for people who were interested in the outdoors. I went on to subscribe and I think I must have continued this subscription even while travelling overseas, as I have every copy. I keep them in the green folders in my office for my students to reference.

It turns out that I ended up in a career in the outdoors and have been lecturing in outdoor education and recreation, training future teachers and leaders for the past 24 years (probably over 600 students by now). I have chosen to remain active in the field and I am out on trips with students throughout the unit year. I have three children and a husband who all enjoy their different outdoor adventures and in fact my eldest boy has just finished school and is keen to work in the outdoor field.

Sandy Allen-Craig
Hampton, Victoria

Reader's letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to *Wild*, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, Vic 3025 or email editorial@wild.com.au

Corrections and amplifications

In the last issue of *Wild* in our tent survey on page 66 we listed the price of the MSR Hoop as approximately \$700, its price has now been set at RRP \$599.

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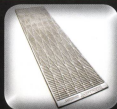
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Pipe Dreams in Nepal



Photographer Simon Neville writes: *It was wet and muddy, my feet hurt and I was carrying too much gear. I could have done a bit of complaining – until this guy showed up, carrying an 80-kilogram load. He was walking for five or six days up the Marsyangdi Valley, and because of the width of his load he had to walk most of the way sideways! At least he had sandals...extraordinary, but normal on the Annapurna Circuit, Nepal.*

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Mountain Running Roundup

John Harding reports

THE MONTHS BEFORE CHRISTMAS saw two major runs in the Blue Mountains with the Glenbrook Trail Marathon on 28 November and the Narraweek Night Run on 19 December. The marathon was won by Tim Ashby in 3 hours, 17 minutes, 4 seconds, while the women's event was won by Angela Bateup (who was third outright) in 3 hours, 31 minutes, 31 seconds. The 20-kilometre Narraweek Night Run from Katoomba provided an eerie experience for those not used to 24-hour rogaines. Experienced international runner Andrew Lee won in 1 hour, 24 minutes, 9 seconds, while the fastest woman was Joanne Barton in 1 hour, 41 minutes, 19 seconds.

Also in December, Commonwealth ultra-distance running silver medallist Jo Blake from Sydney successfully defended his 2009 Coast to Kosciuszko title in 28 hours, 45 minutes, 22 seconds for the 245 kilometres



from Twofold Bay to the summit of Mt Kosciuszko, finishing at Charlottes Pass. Sharon Stolz from Wangaratta took out the women's race in 32 hours, 14 minutes, 32 seconds. Conditions were testing with very strong winds between Charlottes Pass and Mt Kosciuszko and freezing conditions overnight.

In January the Bogong to Hotham took place. The 64-kilometre race, including 3000 metres of climbing, was won with outstanding runs by current The North Face 100 champion, Stuart Gibson, who ran 6 hours, 59 minutes, 21 seconds, and Beth Cardelli, who set a new record of 8 hours, 14 minutes, 27 seconds.

Left, last year's The North Face 100 winner, Stuart Gibson, blasting his way to first place in one of Australia's toughest races, the Bogong to Hotham Trail Run. **Brett Saxon**

AlpineSAR Appeal

WE NEVER EXPECT IT, but getting lost or injured in the bush can happen to anyone. Sometimes people who get lost are not familiar with the outdoors, but equally experienced walkers can also find themselves injured or lost. Luckily, there are people who step forward as search and rescue volunteers to assist finding missing people and bring them out. Bush Search and Rescue (BSAR) in Victoria provides experienced search and rescue volunteers who are either members of various bushwalking and other specialist clubs, or members of Bushwalking Victoria.

Many Bush Search and Rescue members come from walking clubs, mountaineering clubs and other specialist clubs affiliated with Bushwalking Victoria. Alpine Search and Rescue (AlpineSAR) is one of these and is made up of experienced cross-country skiers, mountaineers and bushwalkers familiar with alpine terrain. As the name implies AlpineSAR



specialises in searches in alpine terrain although its members also join searches in the bush. In the past three years AlpineSAR members have organised an average of ten training days a year and contributed 110 searchers to the 14 searches.

AlpineSAR is currently running an appeal for donations to enable the provision of enhanced training for all Bush Search and Rescue members – maybe you can't participate



Members of AlpineSAR in training.

as a searcher but you can assist the volunteer effort through a tax deductible donation. You never know – one day you or someone you know may need it.

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For further information about AlpineSAR go to alpinesar.org.au and for Bush Search and Rescue go to bsar.org

2011 World Rogaining Championships

CHEVIOT, NEW ZEALAND, PROVIDED THIS YEAR'S WORLD Rogaining Championship competitors with an ample serving of rolling hills. With mist low on the mountains, it made for an atmospheric event. One probably better enjoyed by those not in the running, because the hilly course meant little respite for weary legs. But, of course, going all out for pretty much the entire 24 hours was obligatory for the overall winners, Chris Forne and Marcel Hagener – the latter of whom was relatively new to the sport (with only three

rogaining competitions under his belt). It was the experience and expertise of Chris Forne that led them to victory, although they are both former adventure racing world champions. The duo were competing on home soil, beating Nicholas Mulder and Ryno Griesel from South Africa who placed second; and Tõnu Lillelaid, Karl Lambot and Rait Pallo from Estonia who placed third.

For the full results visit: wrc2010.org.nz

Pole to Pole

PAT FARMER HAS SET HIMSELF a challenge that will see him running from the North Pole to the South Pole, following (roughly) the west coast of the Americas.

Everything about this project is ambitious, from the amount of money Farmer hopes to raise for the Red Cross (\$100 million) to the distance (21 000 kilometres) to the intensity of the run – Pat has planned zero rest days, despite hoping to run the equivalent of two marathons a day, every day, for 11 months. It's an impressive amount of time to be running (think of what you could achieve in 11 months). And, for the trip's duration, word is he'll be broadcasting live on the Internet. That means if he encounters any polar bears at the North Pole, we'll know about it when he does.

For the polar sections, Pat's enlisted the help of Australian polar expert Eric Philips, who will be joining him in a team of four. Pat will have to haul a kayak loaded with supplies from the North Pole. 'Running' might be a bit of a stretch on the polar legs, but the point is he'll be covering the – very dangerous and extensive – polar ground on foot.

Because of the Antarctic stage – and the need to get there before winter sets in – Pat is

on a tight schedule. He leaves in April 2011 and plans a February 2012 finish. Of course, there is a record on the cards. You can find out more at poletopolerun.com



Pat Farmer in training for the Pole to Pole Run.

SCROGGIN

Flood-related Park Closures



A flood effected road in the Grampians. Ross Tay

As we go to print Queensland's parks have suffered widespread closures due to flooding, including track closures in the Lamington National Park. In Victoria, the entire Grampians National Park was closed due to flooding in Victoria's west.

Parks Victoria has advised visitors to avoid the Little Desert National Park and Murray – Sunset National Park, while the Hattah–Kulkyne National Park's Hattah campground has been closed. Down south, the Great Ocean Road's closure between Lorne and Apollo Bay means access has been limited to the Great Otway National Park.

If you're heading away, check the respective Parks' websites (parkweb.vic.gov.au and derm.qld.gov.au) and transport websites (mobiletraffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/ floodalertsand.tmr.qld.gov.au) for closures.



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Whitewater Bonanza

Water spilling into Victorian rivers has meant local paddlers have been going bananas in the best whitewater paddling season the state's seen for a number of years. Over Victoria's wet summer, paddlers have kept one eye glued to river levels and one hand wrapped around a paddle – ready to run whatever creek, river or waterfall. With many waterways usually not run at low levels looking chunkier – like Deep Creek (an upper tributary of the Maribyrnong River), which was pumping at over 10 000 megalitres per day at one point and run at over four metres – there has been plenty of water to be paddled. In fact, some have kayakers encountered rising water levels mid-paddle, adding to the excitement (and risk). The abundance of water has even tempted amateurs into putting-in, with two people opting for inflatable sex toys as their choice of craft on the Yarra River. After they were rescued, police warned that blow-up sex toys are 'not recognised flotation devices'. Indeed.

South African Weed Orchid found near Kinglake

An exotic weed (*Disa bracteata*) was recently discovered in Strathewen (Victoria), where DSE and Parks Victoria are doing a large-scale weed control program in bushfire affected areas. For the Kinglake area and its surrounds, this weed hasn't been known to be widespread previously.

You're encouraged to report any sightings to your local DSE or Parks Victoria Office – South African Weed Orchids look like a greenish brown asparagus spear, between 30 to 50 centimetres tall. They carry between 20 and 60 flowers and, unlike native orchids, are self-pollinated. That means each plant can produce tens of thousands of airborne seeds – a nightmare to control. For more information visit dse.vic.gov.au

Rock Wallabies Begin to Bounce Back

East Gippsland's endangered brush-tailed rock-wallaby population were down to a dire six individuals in 2004. This year remote cameras have revealed over 20 individuals in East Gippsland's Snowy River Gorge. While the animal still isn't exactly widespread, it's great news for this dwindling species.

Allie Pepper on Mt Everest

Following in the footsteps of Sue Fear and Brigitte Muir, 35-year-old Allie Pepper will take on Mt Everest this year – and she's hoping to do it without oxygen. It won't be the first 8000-metre peak for Pepper, who's climbed Cho Oyu, the sixth highest peak in the world without oxygen. The expedition is an independent trip and she will be attempting Everest's South Col route with one Sherpa. She's now back home in the Blue Mountains, working as an outdoor instructor before facing mountaineering's tallest test piece this season.



Allie Pepper
on Cho Oyu,
Pepper
Collection

Black Diamond



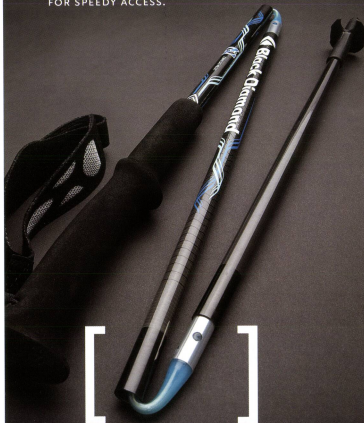
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MacDonnell Ranges Cycad *Macrozamia macdonnellii*



If *Macrozamia macdonnellii* was an animal it would be known as a dinosaur. The MacDonnell Ranges cycad is a member of an ancient group of seed plants that date back 200 million years. They were dominant during the Jurassic period, which is also known as the 'Age of Cycads'. These plants survive in the present day unchanged and are relicts of a past environment with higher rainfall.

Macrozamia macdonnellii is a cycad restricted to the MacDonnells and surrounding ranges of central Australia, where it is a conspicuous, iconic and relatively abundant plant. It occurs on rocky sites, mainly in gorges and on steep sheltered slopes, but also occasionally on exposed hills or mountain tops. The presence of the species in exposed sites that receive little rainfall may be due to past wet periods of a magnitude or duration not seen during the historical record. It's the only cycad occurring in Central Australia.

Cycads resemble palms or tree ferns, but are not related. They have a thick, soft trunk and a crown of large divided leaves. The name *Macrozamia* comes from the Greek *makros* (large) and *zamia* (a group of cycads). They have separate male and female plants, with the female plants bearing large, often colourful, cones of seeds. Cycads are very slow-growing and those with large trunks are very old. The MacDonnell Ranges cycad can have a trunk of around three metres high, but the age of these has not been examined.

Cycads were important food sources for Aborigines, but only after extensive processing to make them edible. The seeds are rich in starch and were used to make flour after being soaked in water to remove toxins. Exudates from the leaves and reproductive structure were also used for medicinal purposes. Interestingly, cycad consumption has been implicated in a number of diseases.

The Chamorro people, indigenous to the island of Guam, have in the past had a high rate of neurological disease that has been linked to the consumption of flying foxes. The bats feed on cycad seeds, which contain cyanobacteria. The concentration of the neurotoxin can be magnified as much as 100 000 times as it travels up the food chain. The neurologist Oliver Sacks detailed this mysterious condition in his fascinating book, *Island of the Colourblind*.

The MacDonnell Ranges cycad has a number of threats to its survival, including fire and loss of genetic diversity through decreasing population size. Habitat with a relatively low fire frequency is critical to the long-term survival of this species because seeds and seedlings (and possibly the insect pollinator) are intolerant of fire exposure.

Macrozamia is believed to be pollinated by a thrip – small, slender insects with fringed wings. Pollinator extinction is a major threat to small fragmented plant populations, because as plants become more isolated, this in turn influences the effectiveness of insect pollination. But pollination is only half the battle in the effort to create the next generation. To maintain or increase populations, seeds need to be spread. It has been speculated that the main seed dispersers of the MacDonnell Ranges cycad were megafauna that became extinct in the Pleistocene period. More recently, a number of other potential seed dispersers have become extinct from the area (such as the western quoll) or have undergone severe reductions in range and abundance (like the common brushtail possum) during the past 100 years.

Michele Kohout

Photographer Meg McKone writes: 'I've often come across the endemic *Macrozamia macdonnellii* growing in gorges and the shaded side of valleys in the MacDonnells, but was surprised to see this line of cycads almost at the summit of Mt Zeil, the highest peak in the Northern Territory and just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. We had approached Mt Zil from Redbank Gorge, camping on the southern side of the mountain and climbing up the steep southern face. After following the line of a dry creekbed and waterfall and dodging the substantial southern cliffs, we moved across to the ridgeline to find the *Macrozamia*s just below it. They must be hardy, as they would be in full sun during summer, when the sun tips across into the southern sky.'

To submit a photo for All Things Great and Small contact editorial@wild.com.au. We will accept photos of plants or animals and pay at our standard rate. Published photos will be accompanied by some history that we will source.

Fighting Floods a Losing Battle?

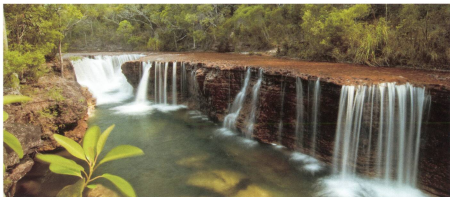
IN RESPONSE TO THE recent devastating floods throughout Australia, various groups are desperately searching for ways to mitigate the impact of flooding. Numerous suggestions such as reforesting riparian zones, dredging river channels and flood plain zoning, have been thrown into the mix, but the recent call by Opposition leader Tony Abbott to build more dams has proved by far the most divisive proposal.

Mr Abbott revealed his new water policy plan at a press conference in early January, stating, 'I think it's time that as a nation we put new dams back on our agenda. The Queensland flood disaster makes this very timely indeed because dams can be flood mitigation devices as well as water storages.'

However, many environmental experts have questioned the usefulness of dams in controlling floods. University of Melbourne hydrologist, Professor Brian Finlayson, says that dams found on large rivers have an air space at the top that is left available to store flood water when needed. 'But like all structural flood mitigation techniques, these things have design limits. These limits can be exceeded, as they were in the case of the Wivenhoe Dam during the recent Brisbane floods,' he says.

Furthermore, Finlayson says, 'Wivenhoe was promised as the solution to flooding in Brisbane so people with property in the flood plain proceeded to add value to their property in the belief that they would not get flooded again, but they did.'

'A big problem is that dams encourage the attitude in the affected population that they



Elliot Falls on the Jardine River, Cape York Peninsula; rivers like the Jardine are more than a water 'resource' they are critically important parts of the natural environment as well as places of great beauty and inspiration. Glenn Walker

are now safe from floods, and when the flood does occur it is a much bigger disaster than it would have been otherwise.'

Many environmentalists are also concerned that the environmental costs associated with a dam are too great to justify building structures that haven't proven their worth in the past. Glenn Walker of the Wilderness Society argues that dams tend to cause more long-term problems due to their very high environmental impact and resulting adverse effect on river-dependent industries and communities. He says, 'Dams prevent the movement of fish for breeding and deny wetlands and downstream ecosystems of critical natural flows. This in turn means that communities and industries that rely on healthy rivers also suffer.'

Walker argues that Australia has long been a place of droughts and floods, and that we

have to learn to live with floods and appreciate their role in keeping our plants, wildlife and industries alive and thriving. 'We must not let the terrible human suffering and losses of property give flooding a permanently bad name. The fact is that most of the flooding in river systems that we see, when houses and businesses aren't being inundated, is highly beneficial in the long-term to downstream ecosystems, such as wetlands and fish breeding grounds. We need to acknowledge the cycles of our country, and adapt in smart ways.'

So what is the answer to living with floods? Both Glenn Walker and Brian Finlayson stress that the most cost efficient and reliable option is to use planning schemes to regulate the use of flood prone land and ensure that we minimise building in flood prone areas.

A Northern Corridor for Nature?

AS PART OF A BOLD NEW plan to slow or even reverse the species extinction crisis Australia is facing, the wildlife of northern Australia could soon have 3000 kilometres of interconnected protected areas to roam.

Stuart Blanch of the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory has long believed the solution to conserving precious biodiversity lies in conservation corridors.

'In order to survive, many species of wildlife need to be able to move large distances to find water and food during the long hot dry season, to escape wildfires or predators, to find mates, and to find new habitats if theirs is destroyed,' he explains. 'Linking these important habitats for

wildlife across the landscape through a series of protected areas is essential for these species to survive.'

Blanch says that the savannas of northern Australia are not only home to unique threatened and abundant wildlife, but they also act as a globally significant carbon bank because the vast areas of native vegetation store billions of tons of carbon. But the area is facing threats from a range of factors including major development, wildfires and invasive species. According to Blanch, 'The high conservation value of northern Australia's savannas calls for such a bold plan to slow the wave of extinction washing over our wildlife, and start

bringing them back to the bush.'

Titled the Kimberly to Cape Initiative, the plan is to establish a patchwork quilt of protected areas that conserves half of northern Australia's savannas, stretching some 3000 kilometres from Cairns to Broome, including some of the world's last remaining ecologically intact areas: Cape York, the Gulf Country, the Top End and the Kimberley.

'The plan is to protect and sustainably manage the world's largest tropical savanna and major network of free-flowing tropical rivers – it will prove a globally significant initiative,' Blanch says.

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A Decade of Extremes

WILD WEATHER HAS LONG WREAKED HAVOC over the earth but how has the weather changed over the past decade in Australia? Are the floods, bushfires and droughts a taste of things to come?

The increase in extreme weather events we have witnessed came as no surprise to many scientists, including climatologist, Dr Ailie Gallant from the University of Melbourne. 'One cannot say that specific events like the Queensland floods or Victorian bushfires were caused by climate change, but such events are in line with predictions that climate change will mean more frequent extreme weather events,' she says.

And climate data from the Bureau of Meteorology has revealed that temperatures are warming, with the last decade recorded as Australia's hottest. 'The weather has been hotter than it has ever been in the past, so events like heatwaves were more prevalent,' Gallant says. She explains that the earth tries to keep its temperature in balance through a circulation system that transports air and moisture around the atmosphere – transferring heat from the tropics towards the poles. 'A fundamental physical principle is that warmer air can hold more water vapour,' she says. 'So, one of the current lines of thinking is that if more water can be evaporated into the atmosphere because of warmer temperatures, then this will make these circulations stronger. And by making these circulations stronger, it means that the patterns of wet and dry that we currently see also get stronger – wet places get wetter and dry places get drier.'

Gallant does say though that: 'This is an emerging area of climate science and we are only just beginning to understand what might happen to these circulations with climate change.'

Recent climate data collected is consistent with the trends we are likely to see with climate change, with the last decade declared as very dry for southern Australia but wetter than normal for the northwest. 'The last decade has been very tough for a lot of Australians, with persistent drought in agricultural regions, Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, and more recently the severe flooding in Queensland,' Gallant says. However, she cautions that the extreme events we've seen over the last decade are only just now pushing the boundaries of what we've seen in the past. What happens in the next decade will be very telling.'

So what should we expect in the future? According to Gallant, in the next decade climate models predict that the effects of climate change will continue to amplify, regardless of what we do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. 'There is a lag in the climate system, so the effects of greenhouse gases on the world's climate that we see now are from those emitted a long time ago. This means,' even if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions tomorrow, the planet would continue to feel the effects for several decades.'

The increases in hot weather extremes are expected to continue, meaning the potential for more frequent and severe extreme weather events. However, what happens to rainfall remains uncertain. 'Over the next few decades I expect that the adaptability of society will be tested as,' Gallant says. 'Our current infrastructure is built for the conditions we have been used to in the past, not the warmer and more extreme weather that is predicted.'

The Green Pages are compiled and written by Sally Sherwin.



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Cattle Return to the High Country



The Bogong High Plains (near Mt Nelse) is still recovering from cattles grazing. David Neilson. Left, cattle damage on the Wellington Plains, before grazing was banned. Phil Ingamells

IN EARLY JANUARY THE NEW Victorian State Government delivered one of its most controversial election promises – cattle have returned to Victoria's Alpine National Park as part of a trial that will investigate the effectiveness of grazing as a tool to reduce bushfire risk. The Bracks' Government banned grazing in the park in 2005 after an investigation that recommended that, even if grazing were to continue in the future, cattle should be kept out of the High Country for at least ten years to allow it to recover from the 2003 bushfires.

The move has reignited the long-standing debate over the true value of grazing to reduce bushfire risk. The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) believes there is not enough evidence to form an opinion yet on how effective it is for fuel and fire management purposes, so they have commissioned a scientific research program. Led by Professor Mark Adams of Sydney University, the program will investigate the use of strategic cattle grazing to reduce potential fuel load and therefore the risk of bushfire in the High Country.

Four hundred cattle have already been introduced to six sites over 26 200 hectares of the Alpine National Park and will stay there for the remainder of this year's grazing season. A longer scientific research program will be developed during the next ten months based on initial results. The DSE states that appropriate design principles, including site selection, will avoid and

minimise significant impacts from the trial on important natural values and threatened species and communities. But many conservationists argue that there is no evidence that cattle grazing significantly reduces the impact of bushfires and the move will only result in disastrous consequences for the environment.

Ecologist Dr Greg Moore, believes the reintroduction of cattle must be more about politics than the sustainable management of the alpine environment. 'I know of no ecologist or environmental scientist who would advocate the reintroduction of cattle for the good of the alpine ecology,' he says. 'Victoria's ecosystems have been under enormous stress and some, such as the State's grasslands, are among the most threatened in Australia – grazing will only amplify this threat.'

Phil Ingamells of the Victorian National Parks Association, agrees, and questions the integrity of the process. 'The Government's reintroduction of cattle to Victoria's High Country has been conducted under an extraordinary level of secrecy,' he says. 'The Weekly Times quoted the cattlemen as saying that they were asked to keep quiet about it to avoid intervention by the Federal Government, which has the capacity to use Federal environmental law to stop the reintroduction. For a start, there is absolutely no evidence that High Country grazing significantly reduces the bushfire risk – a comprehensive study of the 2003 fire on the Bogong High Plains showed that

grazing had no significant difference on either the spread of fire, or its severity.'

Ingamells also says that the recent Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission made no recommendations to introduce alpine grazing or research. He argues that: 'If, for some reason, the Government decided there was a need to conduct this research, there is absolutely no need to conduct it inside the national park – there are many alpine and sub-alpine areas outside the park where grazing continues.'

Ingamells makes some other interesting points about the political nature of the decision. 'While the DSE has officially commissioned this research there was no involvement of its research institute, or the research arm of Parks Victoria in developing the program – the authorship of the research design is a complete mystery.'

He also notes that the research sites match the boundaries of previous grazing licence areas, while the same cattlemen are holding the licences who formerly grazed the areas.

Ingamells says, 'Our Alpine ecosystem is so unique, and cattle grazing will threaten at least 12 of our native plants and wildflowers that are listed under Federal law to be of national significance. Cattle will trample and destroy native vegetation and wetlands, they will cause soil erosion, they will pollute waterways and spread weeds.' He is also worried that this decision will lead to other state governments reintroducing cattle to national parks in other states.

Wild spoke to Professor Mark Adams, but he was unable to comment on the program at this stage.

Nature Channelling

Quentin Chester talks to the animals



To be honest, when I started walking there was often no clear sense that we were humble visitors in a shared space. Other animals, if acknowledged at all, were treated as bit players or distractions in our headlong rush to cover ground and make the place our own.

I met a goanna the other day. It was a good morning for a stroll. Good for both of us in fact. At ground level the sun-soaked grass was plenty warm enough to fix a grin on any lizard. Meanwhile, the breeze above helped cool my brow. As our paths crossed, the goanna and I both paused to pay our respects. I edged a bit closer to admire the whirl of yellow dots spattered along his dark flanks. He looked me up and down, tongued the wind, then swaggered past me, his pointy jaw tipped high like a saluting commandant. Living on Kangaroo Island, goanna encounters are almost a daily event in the warmer months. Several are camped close to our place, including a couple under the front deck and another near the back shed. Being the top land predator here, the goannas have a plucky, take-no-prisoners attitude. Such confidence is reassuring and they're handy neighbours if you want to keep tiger snakes at bay. (In a fight, put your money on the lizard.) All the same, looking at that big goanna in the grass, there was also the feeling that I wouldn't have to lay down too long before he might sneak back and chomp into my leg.

It's taken nearly a year of living in the country to appreciate that the big change from city living is less a factor of surroundings than a different feeling for place, a gut response spurred on by the creatures that mob and flap around us. There's no mistaking the postcard quality of the sea and bush views, but to categorise our outlook as 'scenery' makes it oddly distant, and as robbed of pulse and breath as any LCD display.

The reality is we live side by side with everything from possums and skinks, to echidnas and wallabies. On any given evening about 60 or so kangaroos straggle past the house to spend their nights munching in the grassy paddocks nearby. Throughout the day the sky around us is flecked with birds on the wing: fussing groups of wrens, honeyeaters and finches, kestrels hovering and crying out, great mobs of crows marauding along the coast and, on most days, patrolling eagles, kites and falcons. It's the same story down in the bay with schools of mullet, cormorants fishing, visiting seals and large pods of dolphins.

So compelling is this animal presence that going for a walk and not seeing an array of creatures would be a novel experience. Day by day you accrue an alertness to wildlife, an

eye for shifting moods and groups that no fleeting visit can give. There are other rhythms too. The spring days when the sheoaks turn coppery red, or the native clematis and prickly wattle burst into flower, and those sudden warm evenings when the air fills with dragon flies or saturniid moths.

And, just in case anyone imagines all this activity is of the cutesy kind, country living also means contending with seasonal home invasions of mice, millipedes and blowflies. Through spring, sparrows and swallows constantly swoop in under the eaves in manic bursts of nest-building. And while spiders tend to ever-bigger webs, geckos stalk the windows at night and big flying beetles clatter into the screen doors. Often it feels like we're under siege and nature is just waiting for us to go so it can move in and party big time.

When I do leave and visit what passes for normality, the contrast to 'home' is more than a little off-putting. With their high-rise towers and choked downtown traffic, cities are predictably unfulfilling. Worse still, in a way, are the outer suburbs and farmlands where the remnants of habitat linger but the tree branches are mostly bare, save for the odd magpie or two. These days I look differently at what once appeared from the outside to be perfectly normal bushland. A year on a creature-filled island has spoilt me for life. I've become a nature snob.

So much of Australia's temperate woodland and grassland habitats are a faint echo of their former selves. These are the places we've ripped into the most. Over the past 200 years 22 mammal species have become extinct in Australia, while numbers continue to dwindle for several others. Many of our most endangered plants are grasses and understory species. Even in national parks there's often a deserted, ghost-town feel to woodland landscapes. Reading accounts of early exploration west of the Great Divide, you can't help thinking that if these first European travellers were to return they would all ask the same question: Where did all the native animals go?

To fathom a little of what this habitat and population loss means, you can do worse than hang out on a wild island or its equivalent. The 1000-metre-high Consuelo Tableland in the upper reaches of Queensland's Carnarvon National Park is a virtual island. It's home to an incredible 57 species of mammal, including seven types of

kangaroo and wallaby. Of the 172 different birds in the park, there are no fewer than 12 sorts of parrot and 14 honeyeater species. With a rich mix of tall timber and a patchwork of lush grasslands this lost world is an example of how nature really hums when given a chance.

Offshore islands have a knack of revealing many unusual hidden or long-suppressed aspects of animal life. Many years ago I spent a few days walking among mobs of black-footed rock wallabies on Mondrain Island off Esperance in Western Australia. It remains one of my most spellbinding experiences in the outdoors. Not just because there were scores of wallabies larking about the granite rocks, but because they also seemed much less wary than any other mammal species I'd encountered before. These were creatures at least as curious and at ease as I was.

Some of this innocence is at play here on Kangaroo Island too. Kangaroos of all ages regularly turn up our doorstep, while possums and wallabies often bop around on the deck. I get the feeling that if the lounge room door was left open they'd be happy to come in and pull up a chair. To lie in bed and have a young kangaroo staring at you through the window from a metre or so away feels uncanny but never unnatural. It's just that here the tables are turned and we humans are the 'exhibits', the odd ones out.

Living in the midst of this activity is a daily eye-opener. Whether you seek it or not, nature spills and surges all around us. It's in your face, it overwhelms.

This feeling is daunting and energising all at once. It's a sensation I first encountered in Kenya walking beside the Meru River. Camped on the bank with only the thin wall of the tent between me and the cries and roars of the African night was like no walk I'd been on. To top it off, I woke in the morning to a screeching troop of baboons in the trees just across the water. A little of this same feeling hangs over the rivers of Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. The signs and sounds mightn't be quite so obvious but the animal presence is still impossible to ignore. You want to swim? Hey, no problem, just jump on in – but maybe keep an eye out for snakes and crocs.

Come to think of it, this is what people have been doing for most of history. Our survival depended on knowing and respecting the strength of what circles the watery depths and walks the shadows beyond the campfire. Now, however, most people's lives are configured such that nature – and especially hairy, scaly, unpredictable animal life – is kept much further away than just arm's length. At best it's a decorative or background thing – first for the Pay TV mill,



Above and lower left, *Quentin's charming neighbours, Kangaroo Island kangaroos, an island evolved subspecies of the western grey kangaroo. Both photos by Quentin Chester*

or a handy source of caricatures for Optus ads and Disney flicks.

What we've done to our neatly paved corners of the world has duped us into thinking that there's our life, and then there's wildlife. This disconnect can only make it harder to truly value our fellow creatures. The duty of care we all have for other species slips quietly from view or becomes somebody else's problem. To imagine people can get by in isolation or control their own fate without regard to biological diversity is not just arrogance but denial. History repeatedly shows that, when we end up in places where other creatures can't survive, then at some point our days are numbered too.

If there's a saving grace then it's probably buried in our own animal natures. We're hard-wired to react to wildlife in all its forms. In the face of so much self-inflicted harm, it might just be that part of the solution for humanity might lie in how we treat other animals. And maybe it comes down to the difference between the sight of an orphaned joey and a graph of global temperatures.

On the face of it, spending time in the wild is an obvious way to find a saner angle on our place in the scheme of things. Yet I've been on plenty of trips where it's all about flogging through the bush. When I started walking there was no sense that we were humble visitors in a shared space. Other animals, if

acknowledged at all, were treated as bit players or distractions in our headlong rush to cover ground and make the place our own.

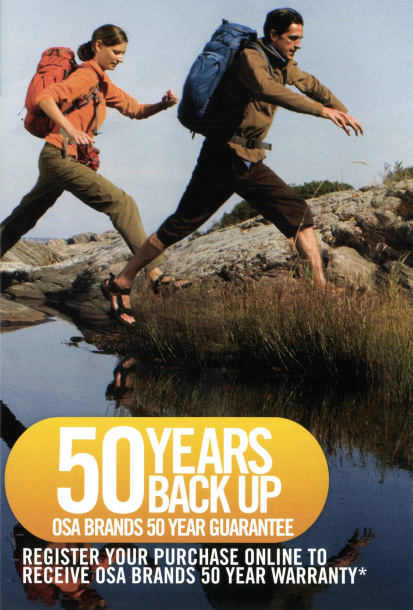
Even now I'm still caught out. I could be stumbling blithely through the mallee or fixating about taking a sunrise photograph when something pushes me back into another flow of events unfolding. An echidna will appear from nowhere and wander casually into shot. Or, as happened on a quiet Sunday evening when I was fiddling with a tripod, I hear a strange sound and look up to see a pair of southern right whales cruising into our bay.

There's a simple reality I keep knocking into on this small island: even in a place as hemmed in as this, there's always a lot going on. Much more than we might imagine or measure. More than can be pinned down in a photo or geological table or plant list. It doesn't matter how many times the parts are added up, you'll never get the whole picture. And besides the essence here is not something that you can put a frame around and look at. But get out into the swim of it all and take the time to meet a goanna or kangaroo or two and maybe, just maybe, you can start to feel the signs of vital life.

A Wild contributor since issue no 3, Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and the author of six books about wilderness places. Blog: quentinchester.blogspot.com

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Linda and Canadian guide Sarah McNair-Landry hauling sleds on the way to the North Pole in 2010. All uncredited photos by Rob Rigato

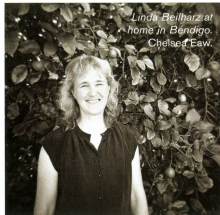
There are no rules governing a) what an adventurer should look like, or b) archetypal adventurer demeanour. But many a fearless adventurer takes the form of a hardened outdoorsman, often with an ego as ample as the wilderness expanse they dream of exploring. Undeniably, Linda Beilharz is an exception.

Words *Chelsea Eaw*

Linda is a woman of 50 whose youthful eyes gleam with a child-like fervour. On first meeting her, Linda's character isn't as dominating as one might expect from a gung-ho adventurer, but the people who've known her for years speak with admiration about her quiet strength.

It's this, among her other traits – determination, grace and focus – that has allowed Linda to rack up an impressive expedition portfolio. In 2004 Linda, who hails from the Victorian country town of Bendigo – became the first Australian woman to ski to the South Pole from Hercules Inlet. In 2007 she crossed the Greenland icecap, east to west. And in 2010 she became the first Australian woman to reach both poles on foot, when she made it to the North Pole. For her achievements, the Australian Geographic Society named Linda its Adventurer of the Year for 2010.

Far from seeking the limelight, Linda's attitude towards her 'firsts' is expressed in a self-penned profile in the *AlpineSAR* newsletter. She writes: 'It's a funny thing becoming the "first Australian Woman to ski



Linda Beilharz at home in Bendigo. Chelsea Eaw.

from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole'... The status of the achievement becomes artificially elevated by a society that values "firsts" rather than [the] achievement for what it's worth.'

The media exposure that Linda has drawn from her polar firsts has uncovered a detail that nit-picking outdoorsmen might shout and scream about: the fact that Linda's pole trips were guided. The term 'guided' can conjure up mental images of fat clients

being short-rope – literally pulled – up Mt Everest. But polar expeditions are a different ball game.

Pioneering Arctic explorer Earl de Blonville explains: 'Linda hauled the pulk [a low-slung sled]. No-one else did it for her. Anyway you look at it, it's an inherently dangerous trip. It doesn't matter if she went with NorthWinds [the expedition guiding company Linda used], or did it solo. If a gap opened in the ice and she fell in, she'd be dead in minutes. She covered 780 kilometres in only 55 days, which is incredibly fast. The second last day she hauled for 18 hours non-stop in -21°C. I don't think people realise how challenging it is.'

Think of eating, for 58 days, dehydrated meals for dinner. Of having to wrestle with three layers of clothing – all of them with zips running in different directions – to go to the toilet. Even preparing for bed is a cumbersome operation; your mouth has to be exposed to the cold or else moisture from your breath might freeze in your down bag. And those are just the mundane



From left to right,
Linda crossing a dangerous lead
on the way to the North Pole.
With husband Rob Rigato at the
North Pole. Linda and Sarah
McNair-Landry manhandling a
sled over the ice.



minutiae of polar existence. Don't forget that your average day involves pulling a load (as heavy as a grown man) while negotiating slippery pressure ridges. And the distances are massive. Conceptualising how far you have to walk is difficult. Linda's walk to the North Pole spanned about 780 kilometres – a distance nearly equivalent to walking from Sydney to the Gold Coast. With, of course, added extras like wind, ice, water and polar bears.

Even preparing for an icecap trip can take years of hard slogging. Linda has spent no less than a decade training for and doing expeditions. It started back in the early 2000s, when Linda applied for a trip being led by Brigitte Muir – a well-respected Australian mountaineer.

'Brigitte told me I didn't have enough experience,' Linda recalls. 'She was quite right. My thinking wasn't big enough, in terms of experience, at that point. You know, I thought I was doing marvellous things, but really I wasn't.' But by 2004, Linda had done the hard yards, attempted the South Pole, and succeeded.

The history buffs among you will remember that earlier on, Brigitte Muir did a walk to the South Pole. So Linda's – or rather, the media's – claim may be a little confusing. But it turns out the two trips were completely different endeavours, as Brigitte explains: 'No, no. It's not the same at all! I say it was 'a walk'. I did it because I wanted to get some training in Antarctica. It was training because we wanted to do a new route from Pine Island Bay [that trip didn't eventuate]. My walk was 116 kilometres.' Eric Phillips elaborates: 'To do the Last Degree, which is what Brigitte did, you fly to 89° south and walk or ski to the South Pole. Hercules Inlet is 1100 kilometres from the South Pole. So, in the

purist sense, Linda was the first Australian woman to have skied to the South Pole.'

Linda's CV – or what must be on it – says a lot about her. She conceived and spearheaded Journeys for Learning, a linking body that fosters a dialogue between adventurers and the general public. Her personal interest in women's issues has culminated in a senior position as Executive Officer at Women's Health Loddon Mallee, a company focused on improving the conditions women live in. And her leadership roles don't end there – she's also the president of AlpineSAR.

Many of Linda's peers are in total admiration of her modesty. 'She has a pilot license,' Mark Oates, a fellow AlpineSAR member who's known Linda for eight years, tells me. 'She worked hard to get it, and you just wouldn't know. She doesn't talk about the things she does. She just goes away and does it. And adventure is just one part of her life – supporting communities is another major focus for her.'

Damien Gildea, an Australian mountaineer who met Linda in Canada and Antarctica, expresses a similar sentiment about her humble disposition: 'She seems to do no more publicity than is necessary to either raise the heinous [amount of] cash needed, or publicise whatever good cause she is helping. She's clearly not in it for the fame and glory. I'm impressed she gets the money and just goes and does it. I'm a little disappointed she still goes guided, because she's obviously quite competent and, unlike plenty of other clients, could probably do at least some of these trips unguided. Maybe she doesn't need to impress anybody who thinks like that – which is impressive.'

It may be tempting to pigeonhole Linda as an average Jane with a big tick list, but

Linda's second icecap expedition wasn't in the pursuit of a 'first' (none of them were, really), nor was it guided. On a private trip in 2007, Linda skied across the Greenland icecap successfully with team mates Roger Chao and Rob Rigato (her husband). She and Rob also attempted the sultry (by icecap standards) South Patagonian icecap. The trip wasn't successful. By halfway time, they were only seven kilometres from their start point. The rain – some of which was seasonal and some of which was not (it was 20 degrees warmer than they expected) – slowed them down. The warmer temperature meant there wasn't any snow, so sleds – that they were expecting to drag – had to be carried. With zero time to spare on either side of their three-week window, and being sensitive towards needing rescue (which costs countries money), they called it quits.

'To be beaten off the South Patagonian icecap is not unusual,' says Eric Phillips, who skied across with kites and kayaks in tow in 1995. 'There's no real standard route, and not many people do it. And it's just nasty: strong wind, huge precipitation, glaciers, crevasses. It is one of the wettest places in the world – horrifically cold.'

'I guess it's about taking responsibility for our own evacuation as well,' Linda reflects. 'And it helped me realise, you know, we call all these things icecaps, as if they're the same. They're actually really different. The obstacles are different; the challenges are different.'

Take the North Pole, for instance. Eric Phillips calls it one of the hardest ice journeys the earth has to offer: 'When you ski to the South Pole you can stumble across other teams, or evidence of ski trails,' Eric says. 'At the North Pole, everything's always moving, always in flux. You never



see evidence. You never have the same conditions.' And that's what makes any journey to the North Pole remarkable.

That said, the value in repeating something that's already been done – in re-blazing a trail – can still be questioned. Pioneer Earl de Blonville offers an answer: 'If you simply look at a trip somebody does and how they do it, you can find out what they're hoping to get out of it. Obviously Linda wanted to focus on what she wants from the journey, not the process of organising it. A person who goes solo, for instance, is seeking a different thing.'

We often forget about what individuals are trying to achieve, particularly when something becomes distinguished for being a 'first'. This is probably what I did when I first contemplated Linda's achievements. Celebrating a feat as a 'first' can contextualise an undertaking, but it's easy for us to become fixated on who did what first. You can ask, who walked to the South Pole first? Who walked from the edge of Antarctica? Where is the edge of Antarctica? It never ends. And it's not what's important.

To me, Linda is like a novel that gets better and better. The more I discover about her, the more I like her. She's a woman who's well-respected not only by her peers, but also industry pioneers. Eric Philips observes: 'A true adventurer is not inspired by what they can gain in a media sense, a financial sense, or a social sense. They do it because they want to experience part of the world that few people go to. Certainly I would call Linda an adventurer. She has a history of doing challenging expeditions. They're not as unusual as 50, 30 or even 20 years ago, but they're still not easy to pull off. She's an inspiring female adventurer. The more women we can get out there doing this stuff, the more positive messages we can give to young girls to show them they can achieve what they want.'

Brigitte Muir adds: 'I think it's the way to be. It doesn't matter how old you are or about gender. It's about doing what you love. And Linda is doing that. And women are tough. Tough and wise. And that's a good combination in the wild.'

'I recall one trip,' says Mark Oates. 'It was a private trip to Bogong in winter. Linda drove alone from Bendigo and arrived at 3.30am. She climbed Mt Bogong and skied out there to meet us. I was amazed. Here she was, nearing 50, solo, absolutely not phased by the environment and being out there in the dark.'

The image of Linda, a lone figure in a pallid expanse – calm, focused, and seemingly at home – relishing the moonlight as her only companion, is not hard to visualise. It is a picture of unassuming confidence, inspiring independence and subtle determination. It is a picture of Linda. **W**

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THE SOUTH COAST TRACK

'It is the best introductory walk to the Southwest,' writes John Chapman in his *South West Tasmania* guide, but my timing was all wrong. My introduction to the South-west took place over three decades ago and was a three-week trip encompassing Federation Peak (climbed during some minor squalls), part of the Western Arthurs (cut short by bad weather) and the Anne Circuit (without Mt Anne, which had been totally obliterated from view). Though I'd walked in other parts of Tasmania and sat in a tent at the foot of Mt Anne for three days in a blizzard, I hadn't managed a successful trip to the South-west since. It was time to muster the effort to tackle this justly famous 85-kilometre walk.

Words and uncredited photos by *Meg McKane*



Traversing Cox Bight Beach. **Left**, a wave retreating off rocks in South Cape Bay. Rob Blakers

The pilots weighed all six of us and our gear for the flight into Melaleuca, distributing people and gear carefully between the two small planes. Did I really want to know that my pack would weigh at least 24 kilograms despite my lightweight tent, stove, mat and sleeping bag? We'd decided on a ten-day trip to give us plenty of time to relax and enjoy the scenery – we would certainly need an extra rest day or two with these packs. But enough of mundane worries, it was time to turn our attention to our surroundings. From the air Tasmania's uniqueness became apparent, with its broad rivers, dark forests (rudely interrupted by the scars of clearfelling) and, what I most wanted to see, the massive grey glaciated cliffs of Federation Peak emerging from wraiths of cloud. Next came the broken expanse of Bathurst Harbour

surrounded by range after range of mountains – far more rugged than any on the mainland – and then we were zooming over button grass plains to land at Melaleuca.

Showers drove us to eat lunch in one of the comfortable walkers' huts constructed by the late Deny King, a tin miner and naturalist who lived at Melaleuca for many years. Outside, a broad valley led off towards the sea. Although the track was furnished with duckboards to keep walkers out of the mud, by the time we'd done five kilometres I was getting heartily sick of it. Then the track rose and sidled around the New Harbour Range and at last we could see the famous Ironbunds, high, dark and forbidding, their summits barely protruding from a scarf of grey cloud. We rested our aching shoulders while watching the Southern Ocean ceaselessly pound the shore, before saddling up again for the final two-kilometre beach walk to reach our campsite on the eastern side of Point Eric. The freshwater creeks trickling across the beach suggested we could forget the big dry in the eastern states for a while.

Our camp was a comfortable spot, protected by forest and still within sight of

the beach. But I didn't feel so comfortable when I discovered that my sleeping mat was flat with an undetectable leak – and this was only the first night of ten. I made my first acquaintance with the South Coast dunnies. They weren't as bad as they first appeared, despite being out in the open and simply a hole with a lid.

We set off along the next stretch of beach under grey clouds, the pearly light suggesting winter to my mainland eyes, even though it was late summer. Striding along the hard sand accompanied by sea birds and the constant wash of the Southern Ocean, I at last felt that we were on a journey, a significant walk that wouldn't end until we reached Cockle Creek. But beaches only make up a minor part of this walk. Most of the track is inland, over a mixture of button grass plains, vegetated sand dunes, lush forests and rocky uplands. And, of course, through the famous mud.

The rain, which so far that morning had only been threatening, started in earnest as we left Cox Bight on our way to the Red Point Hills. 'Glad the weather's made up its mind,' said George with his deceptively



It was mud on the way up, mud over the top and mud down the other side. Paul described it as, 'World Heritage mud'. A stretch of boardwalk raised our hopes for a short while, but was followed by even more of the deep, black, clingy stuff.

innocent grin. By now I'd realised why so many Tassie photos show people wearing their rain jackets – if it's not raining right at this moment, it soon will be.

The track up Buoy Creek was a mixture of duckboards and mud, but hey, I thought, this mud isn't so bad – the soil is basically sandy peat and the mud isn't sticky; I can cope with this. The steep 200-metre climb over the Red Point Hills wasn't too bad either, all on a good track with the view expanding as we ascended. From the top it followed picturesque little quartz-topped ridges and valleys on its way down to Louisa Creek. Showers swept over us as we lunched, making us scurry to close up our packs. Two river crossings were only knee high, the peat-stained water a beautiful ruby-red, though the ropes stretched above the crossings and the warnings against crossing during flood gave us pause for thought.

We decided to use up one of our generous allocation of days and headed off to Louisa Bay. There were no duckboards and



From bottom to top, camp at Louisa River. The author on the Ironbound Range with Prion Beach behind. Precipitous Bluff shrouded in cloud. The group in a tree fern forest.

the track was overgrown in places, which wouldn't have been so hard with light packs, but with our heavy loads tugging at our shoulders we were glad to reach the coast. The final drop down to the beach, almost vertical and slippery with mud, made me wonder how on earth we were going to get back up it the next day.

The lucky found sheltered spots to camp beneath trees behind the sand dune, while the not-so-swift found themselves in a wind-tunnel blowing off the beach. A spotted quoll paid us a visit and didn't want to leave, finding the food in Paul's tent irresistible. It also had literary tastes, nibbling at a book. It didn't quite seem like the magical wild animal I'd seen in the moonlight the night before, a black shadow flitting along the beach with its strange, loping gait.

We didn't leave until midday, sleeping in and exploring the beach with its rocky caves and ferny waterfall. Ian walked all the way around to Louisa Island, joined to land by a thin strip of sand that's exposed only at the lowest tides. By the time we came to ascend the mud cliff it had dried out somewhat, which was just as well – it wouldn't do to put too much weight on to the weathered-looking 'safety' rope.

Making our way back to the main track, our eyes were drawn towards the massive Ironbound Range, which we would be crossing the next day. Whichever way you looked at it, there was no escaping this climb of 900 metres. When we reached the Louisa River it was huge, its bed full of big, rounded rocks. Although it was barely knee-deep, the current was strong and we were

glad to cling to the rope strung above our heads. On the other side we found a lovely place to camp in a forest full of huge gums, leatherwoods and tree ferns. In preparation for an early start we foiled the mossies by going to bed early.

Though the day dawned fine I put on a daggy old pair of thermal leggings I'd brought for crossing the Ironbonds. I didn't want to get caught in a sudden storm while on top and have to take off my boots to get my thermals on. After 20 minutes of boardwalk the climb began up a well-constructed track with steep steps. The only way I was going to make it with my heavy pack was to keep on plodding, with occasional stops to take in the phenomenal view, which stretched from Louisa Bay to Federation Peak and the jagged skyline of the high South-west ranges.

A boardwalk contoured around the tops and dropped down to where the others were having lunch, with a superb view of famous places that had only been names to me – Prion Beach, the New River Lagoon and Pindars Peak. There was even a tantalising glimpse of Precipitous Bluff's mighty cliffs, partly hidden behind a spur of the Ironbonds. How lucky we were to be here on such a perfect day. But we couldn't stay gazing at the view forever, so we plunged into the forest until we reached Deadmans Bay. It was a steep and tortuous descent, as we grabbed on to trees and tried to avoid the worst of the mud. Even after we were close to sea level the track went on and on, muddily contouring around spurs that ran straight down into the sea. And this was different mud: deep, sticky, filthy mud that could only be removed by scrubbing. I was glad we'd climbed the Ironbonds from the west, as the eastern approach would leave you exhausted before the main climb even began.

Despite the smallish campsite being overcrowded with the stream of walkers trickling in from the Ironbonds, Deadmans Bay was a lovely spot for a rest day with its sunny beach and swathes of smooth, glistening pebbles backed by shrubs smothered in red, pink and white berries. Around the rocky shoreline huge stems of kelp swayed in the currents and we could see the top of Precipitous Bluff. But there are serpents in Paradise. Just when an accident was least expected, George put his back out bending down to do some washing. After freezing his lower half in the icy creek for as long as he could stand it and reducing the swelling with anti-inflammatories, he spent the rest of the day in his tent. The next day he recovered enough to hobble on with two walking poles and a wan smile.

At the western end of Prion Beach we encountered a scrub-down station aimed at preventing the spread of the deadly soil fungus *Phytophthora*. We willingly hauled gear out of our packs to do our duty to the environment. At last we were on the fabled Prion Beach, the heart of the South Coast, with low clouds hiding our view of Precipitous Bluff and oyster catchers braving the cold wind to search for worms in the sand with their sharp red beaks. After the three-boat journey shuffle across the New River Lagoon, we reached our next campsite, set in a rather dank forest beside the lagoon. The cloud lifted enough to give us a full frontal view of Precipitous Bluff's cliffs, although it persisted in clinging to the summit. The golden light of sunset, streaming through a gap in low hills, illuminated the mist settling over the lagoon and gilded the dune grasses surrounding it, but the cliffs remained stubbornly in shadow.

After traversing the top of a long, forested sand dune towards the end of the beach, we descended a steep wire-and-wood ladder set into the sandy soil and waded Milford Creek. It had fined up and our last views of Prion Beach were among the most memorable. A strip of yellow sand separated the blue sky and white clouds from their watery reflection in the still lagoon, with the steely Ironbonds safely behind us on the horizon. Next came a long inland stretch across heath and mud, followed by beautiful forest filled with luxuriant tree ferns and huge stringybarks. We paid a quick visit to Osmiridium Beach, where the sun was warm enough to make a dip in the lagoon attractive. The campsite on the eastern headland at Surprise Bay overlooked another stunning beach and was an ideal spot to watch the sun setting over the Ironbonds.

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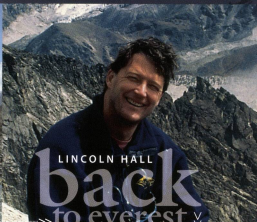
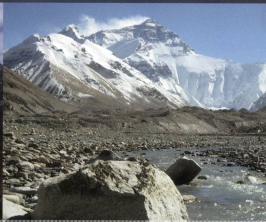
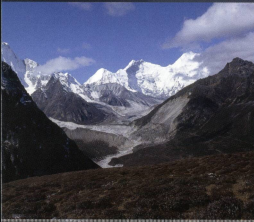
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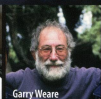
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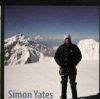
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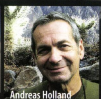
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Main image: Early morning Everest | Peter Walton

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A rocky beach in South Cape Bay. Blakers

Our next day was very short, since we needed a break before the second toughest day of the trip, across the South Cape Range. Though Granite Beach can be difficult to cross if the tide is high and one is forced to boulder-hop its full length, we had only a short stretch of boulders before we reached the waterfall that flows directly on to the beach. Despite being icy, it provided another opportunity for a wash. Along the beach I came across a most unusual phenomenon – a spring was welling up out of the sand,

seemingly small but so deep that my walking pole didn't reach the bottom. The thought of walking into it unawares was the stuff of nightmares.

The next morning a screeching seagull woke me to our second big day – the 460-metre climb over the South Cape Range. It was muddy on the way up, muddy over the top and muddy down the other side. Paul described it as, 'World Heritage mud'. A stretch of boardwalk raised our hopes for a short while, but was followed by even more of the deep, black, clingy stuff. South Cape Rivulet, which we reached mid-afternoon,

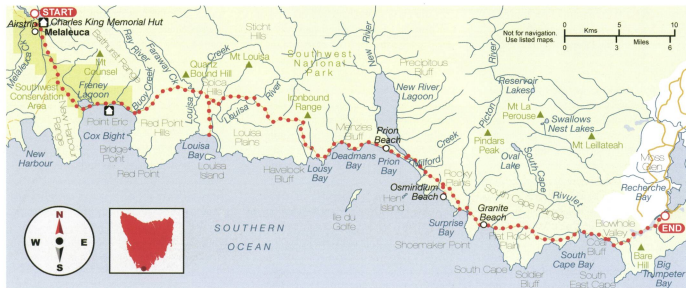
was a wonderful relief. The clear, tea-coloured waters of the lagoon emptied out between the forest and beach, presenting a great place to clean up before continuing to the campsite in the forest on the other side.

We spent a lazy morning in this beautiful spot, Ian sketching, the rest of us taking photos or just wandering around the beach or the edge of the lagoon. Tassie was indeed being kind to us. We determined that next year we'd do Frenchmans Cap after the Overland Track. Precipitous Bluff, I mourned, was now in the too-hard-basket. Oh, the regrets of an ageing mainland bushwalker!

The last day was supposed to be easy, but by the time we'd crossed three beaches and their intervening headlands I was feeling the effects of the previous day's efforts. The climb to the top of Coal Bluff rewarded us with spectacular views back along the coast before we turned inland at Blowhole Valley. We knew we were nearly back when we encountered tourists smelling strongly of soap, cosmetics and deodorant. No doubt they enjoyed a different olfactory experience as they passed us. Then it was time for group shots of the party at the end of the track, cottages with their gardens full of lumpy hydrangeas and a final night outdoors with the wind fighting my tired efforts to put up the tent.

Rain in the early hours of the morning had me wondering how I was going to pack up in the wet without getting everything soaked. Despite this, somehow it seemed strangely apt that we'd started damp and now we were ending damp. Still, it was the magnificent days in between that I would remember.

Meg McKone has been a keen bushwalker since childhood. She is making the most of her retirement by fitting in as much as possible. She especially enjoys poring over maps to work out new and interesting routes to explore.



Taking *the* long way



Christina Armstrong explores an off-track circuit around Marengo Creek in the Guy Fawkes River National Park in NSW

We were on the southern side of Marengo Creek, at the top of the 36-metre first drop of Marengo Falls. From this vantage point we could see that below us the creek was forced behind a narrow but towering fin of rock, before turning a 90° bend and plummeting 160 metres off the escarpment in a single sloping drop.

We were just two kilometres from our car, across cow paddocks and over fences, and from where we stood it looked as if there was a way down into the narrow dog-leg below. The access was from the other side of the creek and offered the exciting prospect of spectacular views of the valley below from the very rim of the big main drop. However, according to our planned route, it would take us four days to get to this dog-leg on the other side of Marengo Creek. We were taking the long way round.

The walk my partner, Caz, had planned was new for us, with plenty of tightly packed topographical lines and very few marked

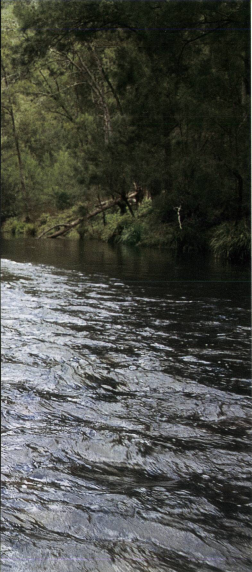
tracks, taking us in and out of the deep and remote Guy Fawkes River National Park.

In the lead up to our trip, rain had fallen consistently for three weeks. Major floods had inundated our hometown of Coff's Harbour and threatened to cut off access to our planned Easter weekend walk. With just one day to spare, the main road into the mountains was reopened after being closed by massive landslides, so we decided to gamble on other smaller back roads also being passable. As the park lies in a rain shadow on the northern edge of the New England Plateau in northern New South Wales, we also felt confident of at least four days of drier weather than at home on the coast.

We left late on the Thursday night and drove into the dark, heading 140 kilometres west towards the rugged, deeply etched valley carved out by the Guy Fawkes River. The park is now a declared wilderness area and biodiversity hot spot. It is also one of our favourite destinations.

From the top of Marengo Falls the long way round saw us head southwest along the edge of the Marengo Valley escarpment, through open woodland and grazing land. We spotted two wild dogs in quick succession, following a similar path to us as we searched the escarpment in order to pick up the stock route, which travels along McDonalds Ridge and down to the Guy Fawkes River. The stock route is one of the best access points for the Guy Fawkes River valley. It is part of the Bicentennial Trail and was a working stock route up until the late 1960s.

The walking along this ridge took us through open yellow box and stringybark, with patches of towering grass trees and open views of the deep valleys on either side. Halfway down McDonalds Ridge we dropped off the track and headed west on to a side spur that took us steeply down to the Guy Fawkes River. This unnamed spur had our toenails pushing into the front of our boots, eating holes in our socks. We had two hours



Clockwise from left, the author on one of many crossings of the Guy Fawkes River. Looking out towards Housewater Creek Falls. The wild gorge between the first and second drop of Marengo Falls. All photos by Caz Fardell

of this steep downhill, our heavy packs pushing us forward, hidden rocks trying to trip us up as we felt our way through the thick clumps of kangaroo grass.

Walking through a stand of river oaks to the edge of the river, we suddenly realised the full effect of the recent floods. The Guy Fawkes River is usually a wide and often shallow meandering waterway, particularly in these lower reaches. It starts more spectacularly near its headwaters, crashing 200 metres off the New England Plateau at Ebor (near Dorrigo) in the spectacular double waterfall simply named Ebor Falls. In the past months Dorrigo and Ebor had broken rainfall records with hundreds of millimetres dumped across the High Country.

We now had to cross the river that had been at the receiving end of that water. In fact, we knew we would have to cross the river a total of six or seven times before the weekend was out. The flow was running half a metre higher than average. Around us sticks and leaves could be seen hanging high in the trees and we were grateful we hadn't planned our trip any earlier. We each grabbed a strong piece of flood debris to help stabilise us crossing the fast-flowing river.

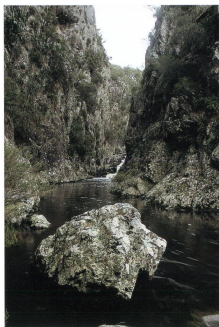
While we made it across safely, on climbing the riverbank we soon learnt there

are tougher things than a flooded river. We were amazed by the scene ahead: masses of farmer's friends had seeded and were waiting to hitch a ride down valley. For most of the year, particularly in winter and spring, these small river flats are covered in soft, low grasses and the walking is sweet, with only river crossings to negotiate or the bottom of a spur to climb before wandering again to the next grassy open flat dotted with ancient broad-leaved apple trees.

Obviously the bumper rain had irrigated a spectacular crop of weeds. Introduced into this wilderness area by travelling stock, the Guy Fawkes River valley is home to a large population of feral animals and plants, including wild brumbies. The original ancestors of these horses were bred by graziers for sale to the Australian Lighthorse Brigade for First and Second World War cavalry stock.

We had little time to look for brumbies that afternoon as we confronted a forest of farmer's friends. Some of these plants were over six feet tall and there was little alternative but to plough straight through. By the time we'd walked 20 metres we looked like a pair of pincushions.

We spent our first night in the wilderness above the river at the end of a narrow spur, around which the river made a long U-shaped bend. Perched 20 metres above the water we had a beautiful view looking back upstream, as we sat for over an hour picking farmer's friends out of our trousers, socks, shoelaces, backpacks and t-shirts. Below us brown doves enjoyed the fruits of the wild



tobacco trees. All around the hillsides rose steeply, most covered with dry open woodland. There were gullies of distinctive dark green foliage marking out the small areas of remnant dry rainforest. Other slopes were dotted with mobs of grass trees.

On day two we started out gently, ironing out the stiffness from the previous day and crossing the river several times. The crossings were challenging as we tensed every muscle, our feet blindly searching out secure holds among the slippery rocks, the powerful current demanding constant concentration. We picked up new bits of flood debris at each crossing as a way of balancing ourselves against the strong flow, as well as new farmer's friends on each bank.

After a couple of hours we stopped for a snack break, using our packs for back rests and stretching our legs out along the warm

river rocks. The Guy Fawkes rain shadow was working a treat and we were enjoying spectacular sunshine.

We were quickly approaching the junction of Marengo Creek and the Guy Fawkes River. This is the point where the McDonalds Ridge Track meets the river and also where we would have ended up, had we not chosen to veer off early. As we approached the junction we came across our first small herd of brumbies. They immediately cantered off a short distance, then wheeled around as a group and stopped 100 metres ahead of us. They watched us cautiously for a while, before wheeling around and heading along the flat. We heard them clatter across the river crossing and disappear on to the big open paddock above the junction. The brumbies looked impressively healthy with a range of rich coloured coats, from dark brown with black manes to creamy palominos. Despite the erosion damage they do to some areas, mainly the small sections of river bank where they drink and cross, the sound of a herd of brumby hoof beats galloping across the river rocks is quite something. As a walker it also has to be said they do some serious track work – we had been using their wide, hard-packed tracks all day.

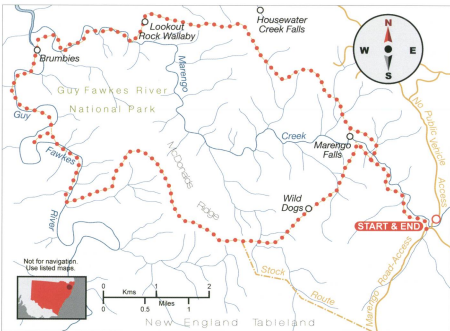
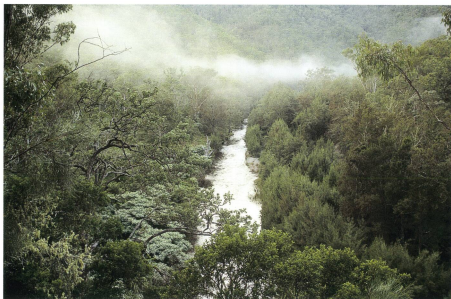
We crossed where the brumbies had forded and as we emerged on to the big paddock we saw the group again. They waited to see where we would go, but soon grew nervous enough to continue downstream.

At this point we headed away from the Guy Fawkes River and began to follow Marengo Creek back towards its headwaters and where we had begun our walk the day before.

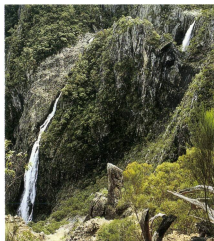
On each river flat the farmer's friends were still a problem, but now we had a new foe. Below the tall farmer's friends grew some of the healthiest, thickest, lushest, stinging nettles ever seen. There was nothing for it but to march through this new pest and find some way to enjoy the tingling, electrical buzzing pulsing its way over our legs as the tiny stinging hairs did their work.

Along this narrow creek we came across our second group of brumbies – this time just three lone horses that quickly made their way around behind us.

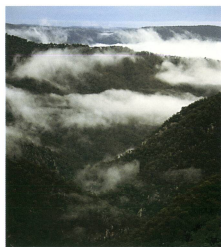
Up on the bank, where the horses had crossed Marengo Creek, there was a nice clear area free of weeds due to the constant animal traffic. It made a peaceful spot for lunch. As we settled down on the soft grass a rush of movement made us turn – suddenly we were eye to eye with a pretty spotted doe only two metres away. The deer took a few seconds to realise we were blocking her path.



Clockwise from top left, a misty Guy Fawkes River, Marengo Falls with the first and second drops and the narrow fin of rock between them clearly visible. Marengo Creek Valley. Plotting the day's course beside the Guy Fawkes River.



I am always torn by such moments. I get upset seeing non-native animals running feral in our beautiful bush, spreading weeds and erosion up and down our rivers.



across to the bottom of our main ridgeline, which led directly to the escarpment. This exit ridge had three obvious steps and split two distinct valleys: to our south Marengo Creek and to our north, the equally spectacular Housewater Creek.

The countryside was so open and steep that navigation was pretty straightforward – going up meant going in the right direction. Each step on the ridge provided us with spectacular views back down into the Guy Fawkes River valley and north into the rocky upper reaches of Housewater Creek, where yet another waterfall crashed 180 metres off the plateau to the valley floor in a twisted cascading drop.

We made it to the top of the ridge in time for an early lunch and perched ourselves on

an outcrop on its northern flank with open views of Housewater Creek Falls and the orange and black cliffs across the creek valley, our attention caught briefly by a screeching peregrine falcon.

After lunch, we followed the edge of the plateau in a southerly direction back towards Marengo Creek. We had one more night in the mountains and so we perched our tent just a few metres back from the edge of the cliff, amongst the grey gums, to watch the sunset over the Guy Fawkes River wilderness. After the strenuous ascent it was a rewarding view. Best of all we had finally escaped the weeds.

We woke to mist swirling up out of the deep valley, filling the forest around us. We packed up camp and carefully sidled around the edge of the escarpment towards Marengo Falls. From this side of the creek Caz was able to find a steep but safe access to the 100 metre dog-leg between the first and second drops of the falls. We clambered gingerly down the scree slope and came out on Marengo Creek, directly above the massive 160-metre cliff of the second drop.

As a result of the creek's unusual path we were able to rock-hop a short way back up behind the fin of rock towards the first smaller fall. It was a magical place: mist swirling about us and the creek lined with gnarled tea trees and ancient ferns. All around the rocky slopes rose steeply. The fin of rock separating the small fall from the big drop below was only a few metres wide; I felt a true sense of wildness as I knew very few people had seen, or even knew, of this magical spot. The valley opened up to our right, spray and mist swirling on the rising air. The smaller falls crashed noisily into the creek up ahead and standing near the top of the second drop was truly toe-tlingling.

Reluctantly we pulled ourselves back up the short scree slope, returning to the misty forest where we had left our packs.

We picked our way back along Marengo Creek looking for a suitable crossing. Once again because of the recent rain this proved trickier than expected. Soon after we came across an old vehicle track and were again wandering past the same cow pats we had avoided stepping in on day one. We headed for the car, leaving the Guy Fawkes River wilderness behind us, with just a few remnant farmer's friends pricking through our socks to remind us where we had been. W

Christina Armstrong is a writer (mainly fiction and poetry). Bushwalking and adventuring are her other passions and she cannot do without wilderness, not just for inspiration but also for her sanity.

Quickly realising she had few options, she spun around and raced back the way she had come. We were left sitting with our mouths agape. The whole encounter had lasted just a few seconds.

I am always torn by such moments. I get upset seeing non-native animals running feral in our beautiful bush, spreading weeds and erosion up and down our rivers. But then I am also thrilled at encountering any wild animal up so close.

After a quick lunch with further visits from blue wrens and firetail finches we rock-hopped and weaved on up Marengo Creek, looking for a campsite at the base of the steep ridge that would lead us back up to the escarpment and the headwaters of the creek.

We had not counted on the rampant growth of plant life caused by the summer rains and we struggled to find any decent place to pitch the tent. We were in the shadow of our intended ridge exit and realised we could go no further or we would overshoot it.

After we had stopped at the next creek flat and set up camp we had time in the afternoon to take a dip in the icy waters. It was a vain attempt to try and quench the effect of stinging nettles on our skin. We went to sleep that night buzzing and tingling. To be honest, the electric-like pulsations all over my legs and arms weren't actually that painful, more stimulating in an all-consuming sort of way. It reminded Caz of a time in Papua New Guinea guiding the Kokoda Track, when a porter slapped himself all over with stinging nettle as a cure for malaria. The buzz did make dropping off to sleep difficult, but the day's walk finally overcame even the persistent pricking of stinging nettle.

The next morning we crossed Marengo Creek and filled our water bottles, taking an extra litre and a half each as it would be a long climb to the top with no water along the way. The exposed ridges in the Guy Fawkes valley bake in the sun and we did not want to be caught short.

Our exit ridge climbed steeply out of the valley. Ahead of us was a 670-metre ascent over just two kilometres. It was rocky, covered in wild grass and just a few stunted trees. As we stumbled on to a bare outcrop near the summit of the first spur we frightened a small rock wallaby warning itself in the early morning sun. From here we descended into a deep saddle that took us



★★★★★ FIVE STAR walking

Andrew Davison takes us on a gourmet bushwalking experience through the Nitmiluk National Park in the Northern Territory in the first of a new series of articles on preparing food in the bush

The meals that bring us together have a system that we all implicitly understand: we know that the starter precedes the main course, followed by the dessert. Just as we know that vegemite must be spread thinly with butter on toast or that a cake is the centerpiece at a birthday celebration. But beyond these meals lies the realm of often bizarre dishes eaten in the bush. These are meals we eat when we assume there is little other choice, meals of convenience that do little more than fill a void in our stomach. I am often perplexed by the cuisine of fellow walkers: strange arrays of dried goods, mixed together in a heated pot without thought, or reconstituted commercial meals that often resemble dog vomit in more than just their visual appeal. One would have to agree that among the many pleasures in life that fine food, a good dining experience and pleasurable company rank highly. Then why is it that many bushwalkers make so little effort?

Under sunny blue skies I followed Brendon along the river's bank. At a leisurely pace, we ducked and weaved between rocks, over logs and beneath branches. I began to describe how I would cook the fish we had just spotted in the last clear pool. 'First I would stuff it with chive blades and hair thin slices of ginger before scalding it in hot oil, followed by short bake in hot coals of the fire and finally adding a hint of lemon', I said, working up a tormenting appetite. Brendon and I were on a leisurely

gastronomic walk. Mixing a zesty twist of good food with stunning scenery, refreshing dips in rock pools and relaxed walking, we had entered the bush armed with an array of simple lightweight ingredients to whip up some tasty delights.

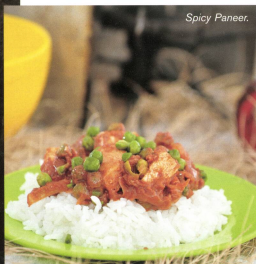
While the walking was not strenuous, the tropical heat was oppressive. Despite this, our food discussion had created an appetite, one that couldn't be satiated by two-minute noodles.

By a clear pool we set up camp. 'The first night is always the best,' I said to Brendon, pulling out film canisters filled with an

array of sauces, condiments and spices. 'It allows the opportunity to include perishables.'

The afternoon light stretched across the land and the sting of the sun was reduced to a comfortable warmth, a dip washing the sweat from our bodies. Brendon reclined in the sand drinking a refreshing lemon drink (a small amount of pre-squeezed lemon juice, sugar and a pinch of salt, dissolved in a cup of water and garnished with fresh chopped and bruised mint leaves), while I set about preparing dinner.

Sunset over Nitmiluk National Park.
All photos by the author



Spicy Paneer.

ANCHOVIES AND GARLIC PASTA SAUCE

Serves: two

The fresh parsley (the tightly curled variety) that is used in this dish, if well protected in your pots, will last at least four to five days and weighs very little.

Ingredients

- 1 x 45gm tin of anchovies
- 3 large cloves of fresh garlic (finely chopped)
- ½ bunch of parsley (finely chopped)
- 2 dessert spoons of lemon juice
- ¼ cup of pine nuts
- 3 dessert spoons of grated parmesan
- 250gms of pasta
- 1 dried chilli (optional)

In the field

Chop garlic. Empty contents of anchovies into a pot and heat. When hot add garlic and chilli, stir fry breaking up anchovies in the process until garlic browns. Add parsley and pine nuts. Stir fry for one to two minutes and then add lemon and parmesan, quickly stir through and set aside.

Bring a pot of water to the boil, add pasta and cook until al dente. Quickly reheat sauce while draining pasta. Combine pasta and anchovy sauce. Serve sprinkled with parmesan cheese if desired.

WARM FRUIT SALAD

Serves: two

This dessert is good enough to serve at a dinner party and is simple to make in the field. Experiment with different varieties of dried fruits.

Ingredients

- 5 dried pears
- 8–10 dried apricots
- 8–10 dried apple rings
- ½ cup red wine or port
- 3 dessert spoons sugar (only 2 if using port)
- ½ cinnamon quill

In the field

On arrival at camp soak the dried fruit in a 1/3 cup of water. When you are ready for dessert place the water and pre-soaked fruits on the heat and simmer for two to three minutes. Now add the wine, sugar and cinnamon quill and continue to simmer until fruits have softened. Add more water if necessary. Serve on its own or with instant custard.

With a clang our spoons fell into empty bowls, hands holding our distended stomachs. Through the lattice of foliage we glimpsed the stars, the Milky Way shining brightly. It was million star dining. 'The cook doesn't wash the dishes, it's a house rule, and the sooner they're done the sooner we can tuck into dessert,' I cheekily remarked to Brendon.

'I can't argue with that,' he replied.

The morning sun filtered into my tent. Soon the fragrance of freshly brewed coffee permeated camp. Rolling from his sleeping bag, I greeted Brendon with coffee and a bowl of banana halva sprinkled with sweet toasted muesli.

BANANA HALVA

Serves: two

This is a great way to eat bananas, it is high in energy and great on cold mornings. You can also sprinkle it with muesli to make a very satisfying and complete breakfast.

Ingredients

- 3–4 whole dried bananas or fresh bananas
- 1 dessert spoon of sugar
- ¼ teaspoon of cardamom powder
- ¼ teaspoon of almond essence (optional)
- pinch of nutmeg
- 2 dessert spoons of flaked toasted almonds

At home

Chop dried bananas into bite-size pieces. Pack sugar and cardamom together and pack nutmeg and toasted almonds together.

In the field

Soak the dried bananas overnight in ½ cup of water. Heat the water and bananas and simmer. Now add sugar and almond essence, stirring continuously and mashing the banana in the process. Once the bananas are mashed and have absorbed all the water, remove from the heat, sprinkle with cardamom powder, nutmeg and almonds and serve.

If using fresh bananas fry the chopped bananas in two spoons of oil for a few minutes, until they become soft, now add ½ cup water and sugar, then stir through. Remove from heat, sprinkle with cardamom powder, nutmeg and almonds and serve.

With slow, deep wing beats, red-tailed black cockatoos moved steadily across the sky sounding their unusual rasping call. Brendon and I set out, crossing a low broad ridge dividing watersheds. The scent of sweet nectar permeated the air as we passed melaleuca and woolly-butt, blue-faced honeyeaters bounding through the branches and creating a racket as they fed.

As we sweated beneath the heat of the late morning, Brendon was convinced the parsley he was carrying wouldn't last the distance to lunch. Searing heat radiated from the sands and the sun beat down on his pack. However, the insulation properties of his fleece proved useful in keeping the parsley buried in the cool centre of his pack.

On entering the narrow band of monsoon forest bordering a narrow creek, we found a small sand patch by a cool pool in deep shade. I took a small zip lock bag of bulgur from my pack, pre-soaked ready for lunch.

NUTTY TABBOULEH

Serves: two to four

This great salad is a meal on its own. To add variety, simply replace a ¼ of a cup of nuts with mixed seeds such as sunflower kernels and pepitas. It also can be served in pocket bread spread with chutney. If you do this I recommend halving the recipe.

Ingredients

- ½ cup of bulgur
- ¼ cup of sultanas
- 10 to 15 apricots
- 1 cup of mixed nuts
- ¼ cup of parsley
- 2 dessert spoons of lemon juice

At home

Chop apricots into small pieces, roughly chop nuts and place in a plastic bag with sultanas.

In the field

Place the bulgur into a bowl with ½ cup of water and let it soak until the bulgur softens (hot water greatly speeds the process). Chop the parsley. Add all ingredients with the soaked and softened bulgur. Stir it through and serve.

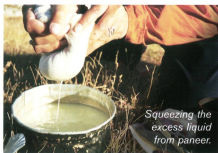
We moved on, again out into the open. Small rocky outcrops provided views across the flood plains below. We rested in the shade of some low scraggly turkey bush, gazing into the heat haze of the horizon. I offered Brendon a small piece of *Pancake*.

'You have a bottomless pack,' he said taking the piece. He felt the weight of my pack; neither of us were carrying excess weight for the four-day trip we were undertaking. I explained there were two important rules when catering for a bushwalk. The first is not to exceed carrying 900 grams of food per day. The second was that to conserve fuel weight a meal should not take any longer than ten minutes of cooking time. There were many other rules, but on shorter, leisurely trips such as this, they were there to be broken.

Next to a series of small cascades, we made an early camp. We wallowed in shallow pools watching a black kite hang on a hazy afternoon breeze. I was excited about the meal I was planning to prepare, and did not linger in the pools as long as Brendon.

'I haven't tried this dish before, it's a bit extravagant for the bush, but I assumed we would have good weather and long afternoons to make it,' I said to Brendon as I set up the stove. 'It will be an Indian treat, but first I need to make the cheese that will go in dinner tonight.'

Enjoying an afternoon dip.



PANEER

Serves: two

Paneer is an Indian cheese that is extremely easy to prepare in the field. You can use it to replace chicken or tofu, or slice it thinly to put on your lunch.

Ingredients

- 2 cups of milk powder
- 3 dessert spoons lemon juice or vinegar
- 1 piece of cheese cloth 30 cm x 30 cm

In the field

Bring three cups of water to the boil in the largest pot you have. Once at a rolling boil, remove it from the heat and add milk powder, stirring until dissolved. Now return to heat, just as the milk begins to boil add the lemon or white vinegar and stir continuously, being sure not to let it boil over. Continue to stir and heat the milk for about one minute, until lumps begin to form. Line the inside of another pot with the cheesecloth and pour the curdled milk through the cloth squeezing out and discarding any excess liquid. Set aside to harden. Once hardened cut into small cubes. The paneer is now ready to be used.

SPICY PANEER

Serves: two

Ingredients

- 1 portion of paneer
- ¼ cup of dried peas
- 3 teaspoons of coriander powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons of garam masala
- 1 dessert spoon of ginger finely chopped
- 2 dessert spoons of dried onion or half a fresh onion
- 1 dried red chilli
- 2 dessert spoons of oil
- 3 dessert spoons of tomato paste
- salt and pepper to taste

At home

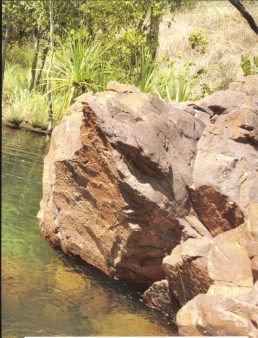
Pack the coriander powder, garam masala, ginger and dried red chilli together.

In the field

Heat the oil in a pot, fry the coriander powder, garam masala, ginger and dried red chilli for 30 seconds. Then add the tomato paste, ½ cup water, peas, onion (if using fresh onion fry it with the spices). Stir occasionally, once the dried ingredients are rehydrated add the paneer, salt and pepper, and cook until the paneer is heated through. Serve over rice.

No sooner had the sun set, the night song of crickets surged from the surrounding trees. By the flickering of candlelight we relaxed, sipping on the remaining port from last night's dinner.

'Dessert must be near done,' I said. 'We can have half for tonight and the other for breakfast, what do you reckon?'



STEAMED BANANA PUDDING

Serves: two to three

Ingredients

(pack together in a plastic bag)
 ¼ cup rice flour
 1 dessert spoon of corn flour
 1/3 cup sugar
 pinch salt
 ½ cup of coconut milk powder
 1 cup of desiccated coconut
 1–2 dried bananas chopped into bite-size pieces

In the field

Place all the ingredients into a small pot and add ½ cup of water and mix. Cook in a double boiler. To create a double boiler simply place a small amount of water in the largest pot you have and place your smaller pot filled with the pudding batter inside the larger. Place on heat, cover and let boil, being sure to add more water to the larger pot periodically. (If your two pots nest snugly, then simply make a small watertight cup out of foil carried for this purpose.) Your pudding should be cooked with in ten minutes.

The sound of rushing water over rock faded as we headed upstream. Soon we were to leave the stream and head out across the plateau. We filled our water containers and set a steady amble beneath towering gums. Finding a comfortable spot we spread ourselves out for lunch. On a homemade seed cracker, we had small slithers of left over paneer, topped with sun-dried tomatoes and a small dollop of basil pesto.

Finally we came out of the forest, hitting the river that was our final night's camp. Sitting on a shaded rock soaking our weary feet Brendon asked, 'So, what are you going to cook up for us tonight chef?'

It was a meal I had saved, a simple 'all in' dish.

SHRIMP PILAF

Serves: two

Ingredients

1 spoon of oil
 ½ dessert spoon of ginger (finely chopped)
 2 dried red chillies
 10 cloves
 1 teaspoon of cumin powder
 ½ cinnamon quill
 5 cardamom pods
 ½ cup of cashew nuts
 1 cup of rice
 ½ cup of dried shrimps
 2 dessert spoons of dried garlic
 4 dessert spoons of dried onion
 ½ cup of desiccated coconut
 2 dessert spoons of milk powder
 ½ teaspoon of salt

At home

Pack ginger, dried red chillies, cloves, cumin powder, cinnamon quill, cardamom pods and cashew nuts together.

In the field

Heat the oil in the largest pot you have. Add the ginger, red chillies, cloves, cumin powder, cinnamon, cardamom and cashews and fry for 30 seconds to one minute. Now add 2 ½ cups of water and all the other ingredients. Simmer stirring occasionally, adding more water if necessary until rice has absorbed all the water and is cooked.

'This sure beats instant potato mash and two minute noodles,' said Brendon.

'Yes, but what I haven't told you we are having instant potato mash for dessert!' I replied.

POTATO AND PRUNE DUMPLINGS

Serves: two

Ingredients

¼ cup of instant potato mash
 ¼ cup of plain white flour
 12 pitted prunes
 1 heaped dessert spoon of butter
 pinch of ground clove or 4 whole cloves

At home

Pack the potato mash and plain flour into a plastic bag together.

In the field

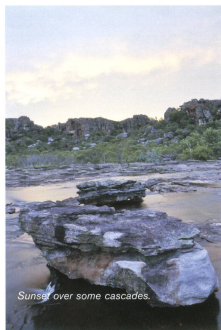
Place the potato and flour into a pot. Add ½ to ¾ cup of water (this will vary greatly on the brand of instant potato you are using, so start with a smaller amount of water and gradually add more until the mixture becomes stiff).

Break the mixture into 12 small pieces and form into balls encasing a prune in each. Bring a large pot of water to the boil and cook the dumplings for five to eight minutes. In the meantime, melt the butter and add the ground clove. Once dumplings are cooked, arrange on plate, drizzle with butter, and serve.

We hurried our packs on to our shoulders with ease. 'My pack may have shed a few kilos over the past four days, but I feel like I have gained some extra ones around my waist,' Brendon said. We waddled the remaining kilometres back to the car discussing bush cooking. The pleasurable mix of earthy flavours of a fire cooked meal, smoke flavoured tea or a warm chunk of herb damper dipped in a spicy tomato soup. Can we ever have enough good food?

The food on this walk was solidly grounded in classic bush cooking technique. It is imaginativeness that defined the meals cooked, using little more than two nesting pots, a fry pan lid, a stove and one metal dessert spoon. Almost all the ingredients were normal pantry fair, and what wasn't was found in a local supermarket. But, most importantly, each meal we enjoyed immensely, it was healthy, nutritious and varied.

The key to the simplicity of gourmet bush cooking is the preparation at home and in the field. Before priming the stove, have all your ingredients measured and ready, have the water collected and at hand, and have all pots ready filled to be placed on the stove once started. This way meals are seldom overcooked or burnt.



Sunset over some cascades.

Andrew Davison takes pleasure in the simplicity of being in the bush. He currently resides in Mongolia and thinks himself fortunate to reside in a nation with an abundance of untouched walking destinations.

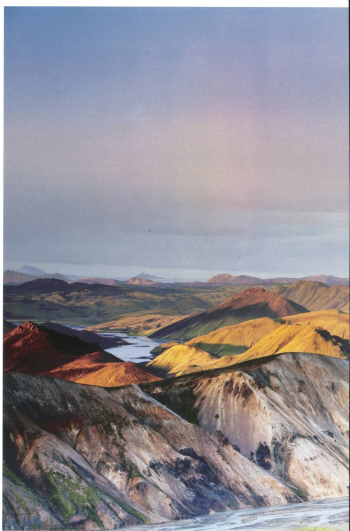
Land of Fire & Ice

Josh Holko captures some of the unique and magical landscapes of Iceland



This sulphur-blue geothermal pool at Hveravellir is one of nature's true wonders. What looks like ice is in fact volcanic silica deposits that have formed around the edge. The water is boiling and sulphur rises from its surface as vapor.







Clockwise from above, icebergs like this one often calve off the Vatnajökull Glacier and are carried out to sea before washing up on Iceland's black volcanic beaches. Distant rain showers pass across the multicoloured volcanic landscape of the Landmannalaugar Mountains. Spectacular basalt columns behind the waterfall Svartifoss. The distinctive horseshoe falls of Godafoss are one of Iceland's most famous falls; the falls themselves take in a height of 12 metres over a width of 30 metres.



Joshua Holko is a Melbourne-based fine art photographer specialising in landscape, nature and wilderness photography. He has studied with distinction at Australian Photography Studies College and the Australian College of Journalism and has an unbridled passion for photographing nature's wild places.

The Land of Blue Sky

"A heroic person is wounded by an arrow; a herder is impoverished by a storm."

MONGOLIAN PROVERB

Andrew Davison treks across the wild Mongolian landscape
from Uyanga to Bat Olzy in central Mongolia



The weather plays an intrinsic role in our lives – particularly the life of a bushwalker. It can gnaw deep into the psyche, dampening morale, or just as easily, bring a gentle breeze refreshing our spirits. It is fundamental to the great rhythmic cycle of life, where seasons seamlessly merge: autumn breezes rattle and hiss among golden leaves; a winter storm deposits a white blanket across the earth; spring brings wild flowers to life; and summer's parching rays burn the earth's surface, sapping its freshness.

In Mongolia, these seasons could not be more pronounced. Nor a people so well adapted to this annual succession of ice, wind, rain and sun. Mongolia is a climate of extremes; temperatures soar to 40°C in the short summer and plummet to -40°C or lower in January and February, the country's coldest months. Spring brings hideous winds that whip up savage dust storms from overgrazed pastures and the Gobi desert, while autumn is a chaos of the four seasons in one day. And as each season merges, Mongolians adapt and life remains as it has for thousands of years.

The swift, icy stream grasped at our ankles, sending a chilly pain to the depths of our bones. I winced in discomfort and glanced towards the northern sky, a distant V-formation of migrating birds coming into view, flying south. This sight, combined with the numbness of my feet, reminded me that autumn was coming to an end and more importantly, winter was beginning.

As we mounted the far bank under an endless sky, the broad valley spread before us. Like button mushrooms sprouting after summer rain, the white domes of *gers* (traditional nomadic homes made from a timber lattice and struts covered by felt and canvas, known as *yurts* in English), clustered on the riverbanks. Smoke billowed from each chimney, filling the icy air with the aromatic tang of cow- and yak-dung fires.

Out of a wide blue late-autumn sky drifted the melody of a lone bird as Antoine and I followed the Ongy River upstream, carefully keeping a good distance from each *ger*. Not that the Mongolians would have found it intrusive if we had passed closely by their homes; a countryside herder would not be upset even if we opened the door and entered without invitation. On the contrary,

we would most likely be offered a seat at the northern end of the *ger*, by a chest where the household valuables were kept, and served a steaming bowl of *sutei tsai*, a traditional brew of poor-quality tea boiled profusely in a weak milky broth and seasoned with a hint of salt. Such is Mongolian hospitality. In a land where the weather can be life-threatening, tradition holds that a traveller is never turned away – even an enemy must be sheltered and fed before being sent on their way. This hospitality enables a herder to ride his mount across the steppes with only the clothes on his back and is a custom that remains to this day. What kept us alert as we passed each *ger* with trepidation, were the ferocious dogs used for security. Mongolians breed their

The next day in the flooding brightness of morning we packed slowly, our hands barely able to function in the cold. I thought of the million herders lighting dung fires with painful fingers just like mine...

dogs strong and aggressive, and in the vast steppes leashes are unnecessary. On one occasion when we ventured too close, a huge beast confronted us with hunched shoulders and flattened ears. Baring its teeth, snarling and barking, it pursued us until we were three or four hundred metres from its territory.

Some kilometres further on, the valley began to close in and steepen. A stiff wind rose, funneling up the valley and raising goose bumps on exposed skin, the sun's harsh light bleaching a now colourless sky. Spying a cluster of scraggly bushes and a lone tree by the river in the otherwise treeless valley, we took advantage of the shelter. No sooner was the tent erected than a flurry of soft flakes came swirling around our camp. The two of us stood staring at the violent sky, as the ice and snow whizzed in drifts around our scarf wrapped heads.

Antoine turned and said, 'You know, they call Mongolia "The land of blue sky"?' I knew he was smiling beneath his scarf. 'Over 260 days of cloudless sky a year they say.'

'It's probably true,' I said, 'just that today is one of the other 105 days.'

Our tent was one of many that dotted the valley floor that evening. Unfortunately, ours wasn't as cozy as a Mongolian *ger*. We spent the evening huddled in our sleeping bags trying to ward off -8°C temperatures.

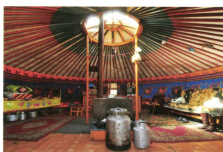
The mobile homes of Mongolians have been designed with great architectural skill and refined over hundreds of years to enable their inhabitants to cope comfortably with the distinct seasons that create the continental climate of the vast steppes. The squat, round design of the *ger* will withstand the most ferocious winter blizzards that Siberia can produce. With the addition of layers of felt covering the lattice walls and a simple firebox burning dried dung, the *ger* is a snug sanctuary from the biting cold. Throughout the summer months, the sides can be rolled up to allow the breeze to flow through, while the entire construction can be packed on to one camel for transportation to greener pastures.

Antoine and I weathered the bitter, moonless night. It brought a silent cover to the land, now white and shimmering in the low rays that pierced through layers of residual stratus cloud, filling the valley and lapping at the hillsides. A land transformed from the previous evening of our arrival.

Finding our way across a half-frozen stream, we moved rapidly in an attempt to warm our feet and defrost our frozen boots. The valley continued its steady climb into the mountains. The river was now white and slushy, *gers* dotting its banks. On distant slopes herders on horseback rounded up their livestock, while women collected animal dung, building huge stacks to last the coming winter. Others passed on their motorbikes, a modern acquisition that now often replaces the horse. However, everyone was still dressed in their traditional outfit, the *dd*, which has not yet found a modern replacement. Like the *ger*, the *dd* is perfectly adapted to the herders' lifestyle and the climate: a simple long overcoat padded and lined with lamb's wool, with lengthy flaps at the end of each sleeve cuff to keep the icy winds off the hands while grasping the reins of a horse or the handles of a motorbike.

Under hurrying clouds we made our way deeper into the mountains. Beyond a distant pass was our objective, a series of lakes, locally known as Naiman Nuur (which literally translates to 'eight lakes'). It is a prosaic name for a place of such beauty, but that is how Mongolians relate to their

Left, a Mongolian herder pens his animals.
All uncredited photos by the author



Clockwise from above, the inside of a ger. Orkhon Khurkree Falls. Lunch on the banks of the frozen Ongy River. Dried dung for warming a ger. A herder sits comfortably on his horse despite the bitter cold.



surroundings; with the daily struggle for survival against the environment, creating complexities would simply seem counter-productive.

It was a life I could easily understand and relate to. No doubt many other bushwalkers would agree that, when we don our packs, simplicity is the essence. For a while we become nomads in the bush. All the rules are the same as for nomadic herders. Moving with our home in tow, continuously searching for our own greener pastures, whether it is a mountain peak or the emptiness of a desert and an endless night sky. All aspects of a nomad's life are paralleled when we take to the wilderness. We find a way of making one item function for two, a way to conserve energy and a way of keeping our food to the simple essentials. My admiration for the Mongolians who maintain this existence for a lifetime is immense.

The cloud remained with us for the two days it took to reach the pass. However, the offerings we had placed on the *ooos* (shamanic piles of stones) we passed on route must have paid off; the gods looked upon us favourably. Across the pass the sky was bright and clear. From our vantage point a grand vista spread before us. In an ancient volcanic crater an ink-black lake contrasted with the white surrounds, snow-covered native pine forest stretched down to its shores and the surrounding mountains rising to heights of over 3000 metres. An icy wind swept up from the lake, screaming through the pass. We could only take our gloves off our hands for a minute to take photographs, before the pain penetrated to the bones of our fingers.

We sheltered for lunch in the lee of a large *ooos*. Standing two metres high, four metres in diameter and adorned with *khudags* (blue ceremonial scarves), it was the largest *ooos* we had seen. We had nothing significant to offer the *ooos*, so encircling it three times in a clockwise direction, we placed a stone upon it, reciting: 'more profit is mine and a bigger *ooos* is yours.' The circling is traditional and demonstrates respect for the spirits, while adding the pebble gives 'wind to your horse' and luck for your journey. We simply hoped for the good weather to hold for the rest of the walk.

Through the numerous layers of our fleeces, the bitterly cold wind ripped the heat from our bodies as we descended toward the lakes. Braced against these ferocious forces on the southern end of the lake were two *gers*. It was easy to imagine what a paradise this location must be in the summer months, but now it appeared arctic and inhospitable. The lake's surface was awash with white caps as blizzards of wind-swept snow brushed over its surface. Within a month it would fall silent and still under an ice sheet thick enough to drive a semi-trailer over.

The sun moved low in the western sky, casting gentle rays through the forest and across the snow. On the hillsides the snow billowed in small tornadoes, glistening in the late light, but on the valley floor amongst the forest, only the heaviest gusts were felt. Quickly the temperature dropped to -11°C . The heat from the camp stove melting ice for water rose only to refreeze in the clear night sky.

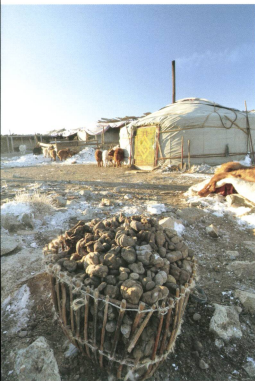
The next day in the flooding brightness of morning we packed slowly, our hands

barely able to function in the cold. I thought of the million herders lighting dung fires with painful fingers just like mine, barely able to strike a match. Was this something you could get used to?

Back on the track, we passed one of these hardy herders on horseback, dressed in his traditional *del*. His relaxed posture answered my question, it could have been a balmy summer's morning. But the expression on his face suggested he had a question of his own: 'What are you two fools doing out here in this weather without a horse?' My Mongolian was too poor to explain, and after a short exchange we continued.

By late afternoon we began our descent from Naiman Nuur towards the northern valley of the Orkhon River, skirting a 20-kilometre stretch of rock scree – an ancient lava flow from the time when the volcano that formed the lakes had erupted. We had not found surface water since the lake and as we descended all the streams we came across remained frozen. How did the herders obtain their water supply? We were melting ice, however, as our fuel supply began to run low we contemplated burning dung.

On the open steppes between the folds of small mounds, in the depression of a stream, the land fell away into a 20-metre cavity, creating a sheltered single-drop waterfall. The gorge that led away was forested with pines. Although not spectacular, it was a pretty spot and a landmark in an otherwise featureless steppe. Only the most resilient snow remained in hidden crevices among rocks, but the temperature still struggled to rise above 0°C , causing water to tumble lazily from the falls and freeze on to rocks. The



bright sky of late afternoon did not hold a cloud, and in the distance a call rang from the entrance of a ger. It was an invitation for a meal and shelter for the night. Antoine and I agreed; the past six nights of frozen fingers and aching toes were reason enough to take up the herder's offer.

Looking down the broad valley, seemingly endless grass plains dissolved into the distant curve of the earth. From the decorative orange door of the circular home, our host Mockbaatar and I stood and watched the silhouette of distant roaming horses before a crimson radiance of light. 'It's beautiful,' I said to Mockbaatar. He turned with eyes full of curiosity, drawing a breath as if to begin speaking, but then he refrained. His expression said enough; the land was not beautiful, it was a land that kept them poor, a land disabled by snow, ice and extreme cold in winter, plagued by dust storms and heat waves in summer. I was an ignorant bushwalker and it shamed me. I could only see its visual beauty.

Mockbaatar's two sons, Sukbaatar and Batzorig, arrived on horseback. They were clad in homemade *del* akin to that worn by Genghis Khan 800 years before. Little has changed in the past 1000 or so years; the Mongols knew there was little chance of changing the land, so adaptation was the key. Mockbaatar's sons herded the last of the goats into their dilapidated circular yard.

Inside the cosy confines of their ger, Mockbaatar muttered to his wife Bayantuya, 'winter is on its way.' With a wordless sigh, Bayantuya poured a steaming bowl of *sutei tsai*. I found the musty odour that pervaded the interior of their ger, fermenting milk and

In a land where the weather can be life-threatening, tradition holds that a traveller is never turned away – even an enemy must be sheltered and fed before being sent on their way.

smouldering dung, settling. Slurping my tea, I sat on a grotty rug covering a dirt floor, the lattice walls that surrounded me were ornamented with random objects: home-made saddles, leather whips, slabs of dried meat, Colgate toothbrushes, pots and ladles – all tools of practicality; their small home and nomadic way of life had no space for unnecessary knick-knacks. The comfortable interior was lit by the soft light from a small flap folded open at the apex of the dome. The fire's warmth and the delicate filtered light created an ambience of tranquil ease.

On leaving the cosy confines of Mockbaatar's home the next morning, Antoine and I set out across the steppes. In the wake of an icy breeze, we followed the broad valley toward Bat Olzy, the nearest town. The clusters of gers increased in density with each kilometre, as did the number of vehicles. The monotonous landscape made time drag and as a warm hotel room beckoned, we began to move at an uncharacteristic pace, determined to have the 30 kilometres to civilisation behind us.

From over a small rise an elderly man appeared, his car had fallen through the ice

of a shallow river crossing and become stuck. With the water only shin-deep, Antoine and I assisted his two sons in pushing the car out of the river. In return we secured a lift to Bat Olzy. As one of the sons guided the vehicle between potholes and over the rocks and bumps of the dirt track, the old man sat chattering in the backseat of the car. He began with the onerous Mongolian greetings, and then proceeded into expressions of goodwill. With these ritual respects out of the way, conversation could then be initiated. The approaching winter was the main subject: the coming of the long, bleak sub-arctic months, when the days are short and the nights long and cold, feed for animals limited and much effort must be spent keeping warm. It is a time when the encumbering snow and cruel temperatures drive even the resilient Mongolians almost to the point of despair.

Autumn had delivered its usual furious mix of weather: blizzards of blustery snow, clear sun-filled days, dust-strewn winds and sub zero temperatures. We had endured only a week, braving the elements amongst the wilderness in our small tent; each turn of the weather etching itself on our psyche. Over half of Mongolia's population reside in tents and live out their existence in this beautiful but challenging environment. The tough terrain has helped shape the culture and character of its people. As a short-term nomad on this walk I found my greener pastures; not a mountain peak or a flower-studded field by a bubbling brook, but an insight and an understanding of a life we strive for every time we head into the bush. **W**

“

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Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park

Beau Miles takes us on a tour of this often overlooked park in Victoria's southeast

A complex intertidal zone of over 40 sand-barrier islands, the Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park on the Bass Coast, is clustered in the eastern shadow of the far more popular Wilsons Promontory. Bold Southern Ocean tailings batter the long, sandy coast of the park, which is a stripped back version of what lies behind in the protected estuarine waters: where intricate waterways weave and meander like the early European sailors that once plied the formerly busy thoroughfares into Port Welshpool and Port Albert. Declared a reserve in 1986, the park is a great destination for those who enjoy sea kayaking, bushwalking, fishing and bird watching.

There are several ways to experience this network of waterways and islands that lies two-and-a-half hours drive southeast of Melbourne. Sea kayaking and bushwalking are by far the best given the freedom for bush camping (although you need to get a permit to camp on the islands of Nooramunga from Parks Victoria). Smart and prepared travel, and a healthy dose of curiosity can lead you to some rarely visited places. Parks, and more accurately, the policy makers that manage them, rarely allow users to simply 'hunker down' each night at the end of a day's journey. But here you can. Like a John Wayne Western, the romance of simply dossing down by a fire, tucked away behind a good-looking dune is a nice change from the scripted night-to-night restrictions of many other parks.

With this in mind, Nooramunga offers a range of kayaking and walking possibilities from day trips to extended overnight journeys. Travel here is at the whim of conditions, the maze of available routes is only made possible by the rise and retreat of water. A loose itinerary, with contingencies, back-up and some local phone numbers is a better fit here than the usual locked-down itineraries we so often travel by. Fixed firmly to this freedom are much needed observational disciplines: awareness of local conditions and the responsibility of abiding by strict Leave No Trace techniques.

Given the obvious lack of sign posting (most of the islands are unmanaged in terms of signage, water, tracks and toilets) you could be forgiven for thinking that 'bush-camping' may be our version of the Wild West. Such freedom is rare now days, but with freedom comes a certain responsibility: very little activity can or does take place that goes unnoticed.

A sea kayak is one of the best ways to explore Nooramunga. All photos by the author

BEST TIME TO GO

While spring and autumn offer the best temperatures, waiting out a winter storm or early morning/dusk travel to avoid high summer temperatures can end up being a trip highlight. The sandflies and mosquitoes in the warmer months can be bad, make sure you bring repellent.

SAFETY/WARNINGS

Having a fundamental knowledge of tides and an up-to-date weather chart is a must. Phone coverage, while good, is not comprehensive throughout the park and extra food/time should always be allowed in case bad weather or the tides lengthen your trip. Taking charts and topographic maps for navigation is a good mix. Sunday Island is privately owned and not to be camped on.

HISTORY

There is evidence that the Brataualung clan of the Kurnai (Guna) people occupied the area for over 6000 years. Using bark canoes they fished extensively throughout the inlets and open beaches, and you will find evidence of this throughout the park in the form of middens. Although hard to find, the middens are a wonderful excuse for a spot of off-track wandering.

Of special significance (and the principal island to walk upon) is Snake Island, which was apparently used as a nuptial island by

newly wed Kurnai couples. Nowadays, far from being a couples retreat, the largest users of Snake Island are members of the Snake Island Cattlemen's Association. Throughout the year the association members ride their horses across the



Surveying the view from a high point on Snake Island. **Top**, stopping on one of Nooramunga's many small islands. **Main photo**, island camping Nooramunga-style.

shallowest land-linking channel, known as the 'Middle Ground'. Romance of a different kind ensues these days; that of the horses, cattle and the farmers that make the pilgrimage several times a year to graze prime beef on the crown sections of park.

European settlement began after early explorer (and genocidal Aborigine killer) Angus MacMillan and his party forged a route in 1840 from Ormeo to the Victorian High Country to Corner Inlet (bordering Nooramunga to the west) in their search for a way to ship cattle quickly to Tasmania. When settlers almost starved due to ships turning away in difficult, shallow waters, a new settlement was established at Stockyard Point (present day Port Albert).

Port Albert thrived as a major port town until well into the next century. Piloting stations for shipping are evidence of this, while grazing (as is still allowed on Snake Island), timber harvesting and residency have left the odd clue to a harsh yesteryear. The paddle steamer *Clonmel* is the most notable shipwreck, having run aground near Port Albert in 1841. Sea kayaking at low tide offers a daily showing of several other less renowned wrecks.

To further add to the romantic past of this place, it is rumoured that Tasmanian tigers were let loose on several of the larger islands by entrepreneurial types at the start of the 20th century. Where the animals would wait



— or die — before their captors would once again hunt them down and ship them to a wealthy client or overseas zoo.

SEA KAYAKING

Port Albert and Port Welshpool are the most popular entry and exit points for sea kayaking parties. Both towns have a pub, milk bar and various locations to set-up and pack-down trips. More ambitious and experienced paddlers have been known to start at Tidal River at the Prom, and paddle around the southern tip of the mainland before heading along the impressive eastern flank of the Promontory.

Nooramunga sea kayaking can be a learning experience. To-the-minute tidal flows rule, leave the mainland without a tide-chart or local knowledge, and you're lending yourself to the twice daily high-and-dry draining of the ebb and flood. Throw in a firm-handed southwesterly, sandflies that could bite through an Ned Kelly's armour, a summer sun that can bake a paint-tin and winter sleet that feels like Antarctic spindrift and you have yourself a fine Victorian destination.

DAY TRIPS

A circumnavigation of an island is always a nice day-out, as you don't cover old ground. Circuiting Drum/Sunday Island starting and finishing from Port Albert is a fantastic 20-kilometre paddle. If the water is calm, stop for lunch or a snack on the south side of Drum Island overlooking the Port Albert entrance. From Port Welshpool circuiting Little Snake Island is a trip of around 12 kilometres, affording deep/fast channel paddling and snaking, riversque paddling between it and the larger Snake Island. Paddling up the Tarraville River from Robertsons Beach is great when the wind is up, while a dash to the northern tip of the Prom (a 15-kilometre return trip from Port Welshpool), is a must in calm weather.

EXTENDED JOURNEYS

Trips of up to ten days can take place in the Nooramunga group. Snake Island has the only reliable source of water (tank water at Swashway Jetty and Bentley Point/Cattlemens Huts), while the small settlements of Robertsons Beach, Manns Beach and McLaughlins Beach have water, make sure you carry plenty of water with you as a back-up.

Great camping spots are available on Clonmel, Drum, St Margaret, Bullock (really the mainland) and Little Snake islands as well as a host of estuary and open-coast spots on Snake Island. Several other non-mangrove islands are also suitable for camping and are well worth exploring.

THE WALKS

Bushwalking at Nooramunga is possible by either getting dropped off or taking some kind of sea craft. Various boat operators in Port Welshpool or Port Albert can drop you off and pick you up at numerous locations throughout the park. Otherwise, shallow draft vessels are an excellent way to navigate the shorelines and island hop over several days. Given that the islands are mostly small, with the exception of Snake Island, using several forms of travel within the one trip provides a great way to see Nooramunga.

The best way to access Snake Island is by Swashway Jetty, which is tucked into a western nook of the island six kilometres from Port Welshpool. From Swashway Jetty walking towards the open coast of Bass Strait provides a good introductory walk across a richly diverse environment. Fires over the last few years have opened up several sections to reveal a gently undulating, sandy massif supporting huge banksias and grass trees. Scenes tend to be prehistoric and ancient, with rare and endangered plants growing furtively in pockets here and there. A mix of coastal and inland walking is available here, with spectacular uncompromising views towards Tasmanian waters and the ever-present peaks of the Promontory. The place feels as wild as the wind tastes.

DAY TRIPS TO EXTENDED JOURNEYS

Day trips from Swashway Jetty, all over easy terrain, include walking to Townsend Point (most southerly, hugely panoramic point of the park, 20 kilometres return), Cattlemens Huts (13 kilometres return) and 'The Gulf' on Snake Islands northern tip (14 kilometres return).

Walking Snake Island end-to-end is a brilliant three-day trip (22 kilometres), starting at Swashway Jetty on the island's western flank and being picked up at the opposite end at Jubilee Point. This would include a night near Bentley Point at the Cattlemens Huts and a mid-island bush camp somewhere near 'Big-Hole,' a waterhole soak for cattle and wallabies.

Nooramunga

Perspective by longtime Nooramunga paddler Brian Wattchow

I've been returning to Nooramunga's tidal waterways, mangroves and shifting sand islands as a sea kayaker and guide since the early 1980s.

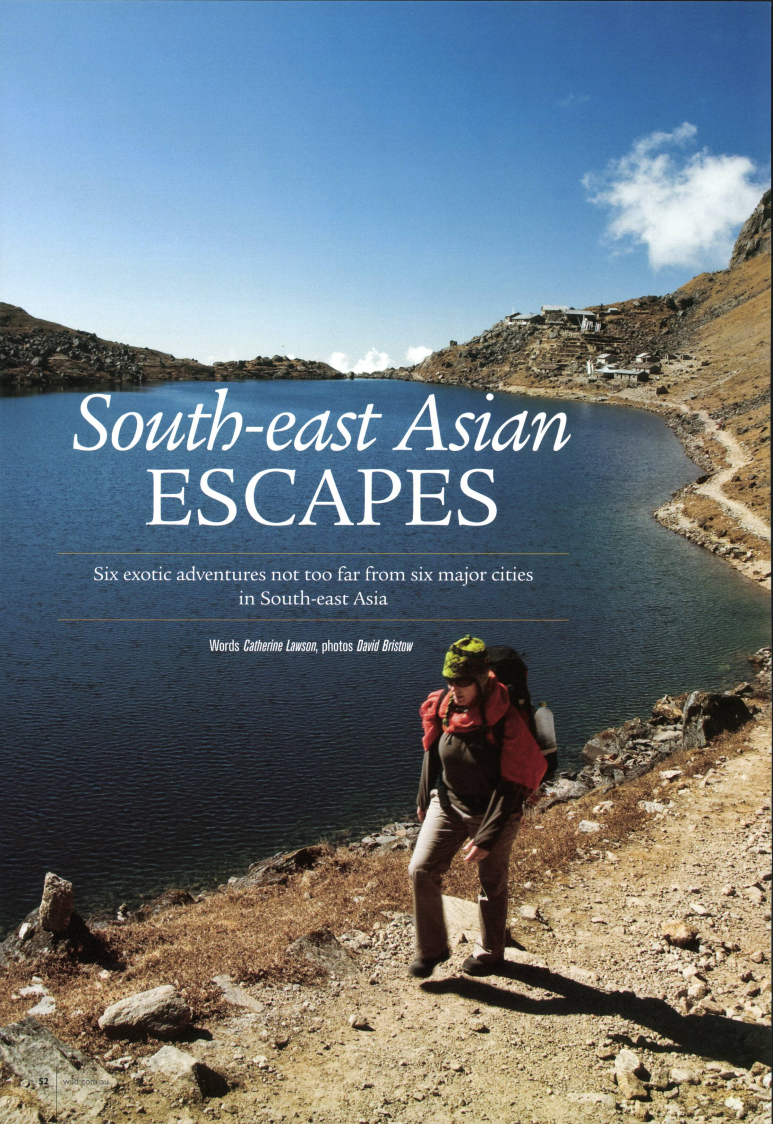
Nooramunga's appeal is of a different order — it takes time to get to know. The estuarine channels snake and curl through mudflats, salt marshes and mangroves close to the townships of Port Welshpool and Port Albert. But catch an ebb tide and soon you will be paddling by the remote, sand barrier islands that have been built up over millennia and protect this part of the coast from the incoming swells from Bass Strait.

This is a place of wind and tide, stingrays and sea eagles. Several times I've had pods of dolphins 'hook up' with my kayak and swim alongside and underneath my boat for several minutes. Migratory birds like curlews and sandpipers arrive each year from Siberia, Mongolia and China. When they leave to breed in the northern summer, they are replaced by other species flying in from the south, seeking shelter from the Antarctic winter. There are year-round residents here as well. The peep-peep of sooty oyster catchers searching for a feed along the sand flats can be heard during the day, and at night the bugle call of black swans flying overhead.

Coastal tea-tree, coastal banksias and mahogany gums grow on the larger islands, which are home to eastern grey kangaroos, koalas, swamp wallabies, and introduced hog deer, not to mention voracious sandflies. It's best to cover up and find a windy, exposed campsite during the summer months. In winter, like the birds, you seek shelter in small bays and behind clumps of trees that have colonised the larger sand dunes. At Nooramunga you need to work with the elements. Get the tides wrong and you will be stuck for hours. Get the winds wrong and you will need to think twice about attempting to cross some of the more exposed stretches of water.

Nooramunga may not be a spectacular or picturesque wilderness, but it is subtle and beautiful nonetheless.





South-east Asian ESCAPES

Six exotic adventures not too far from six major cities
in South-east Asia

Words *Catherine Lawson*, photos *David Bristow*

For short-stay travellers transiting through South-east Asia's busiest hubs, escaping the concrete jungle to stretch your legs in the real thing can be done in a few hours. In these amazing destinations you can watch orangutans feed, walk one of the world's deepest gorges and jungle trek to a Malaysian animal hide to await the arrival of wild elephants.

KUALA LUMPUR:

TAMAN NEGARA NATIONAL PARK

On the summit of The Forbidden Mountain, legend says a giant monkey stands guard over the magic stones of Gunung Tahan (2187 metres). It's a place that Batek Orange Asli hunter-gatherers never visit, but the five-day trek appeals to foreign travellers who test their metal by covering 110 rugged kilometres in a week-long trek.

Peninsular Malaysia's highest peak, Gunung Tahan is flanked by some of the oldest rainforest in the world and the country's largest tract of undivided lowland and cloud forest that provides so much habitat for wildlife that visitors often complain about never seeing any. The reality is that sightings of Malayan tigers, elephants and Sumatran rhinoceros are hard-won, demanding long hours treading hot and humid tracks and sleepless nights spent spotlighting in the park's animal hides.

The deeper you go, the more you'll see. A favourite track for self-guided walkers, the Rents Tenor Trail (30 kilometres) is a four-day circuit that leads to a lovely riverside camp on Sungai Tenor.

Far more rugged is the track that links park headquarters with the villages at Trenggan and Keniam (25 kilometres/12 to 14 hours) where you can explore caves and stake out an animal hide that lures wild elephants. Navigational difficulties on this walk necessitate taking a guide, but there are other options for independent trekkers.

Book a bed at Bumbun Kumbang, an animal hide and saltlick 11 kilometres by foot from park headquarters. After dark, a procession of animals might visit the saltlick – elephants, tapir, mouse deer, wild ox and pigs, so bring a good torch, water, sleeping mat and food.

A recommended day circuit takes in the lookouts atop Teresek Hill (342 metres) and treads along the Canopy Walkway, one of the world's longest hanging bridge that sways between 250-year-old tualang trees, 30 metres above the forest floor (\$2 per person). The track returns via a swimming hole on the Tahan River for a much-needed cool down.

LOGISTICS: Tourist minibuses make the 250-kilometre trip from Kuala Lumpur direct to Kuala Tahan village, or complete the final leg of the trip by motorised sampan by the Tembeling River (\$14 to \$20). Book ahead if you visit between May and August when the dry conditions deter leeches and lure walkers, and bring insect repellent, lightweight clothing, binoculars and a torch. wildlife.gov.my

KATHMANDU: HELAMBU VALLEY

On the outskirts of Kathmandu, a 45-minute taxi ride out of Thamel, the road ends at Sundarjal where a steep walking track climbs up through Helambu Valley on a five-day adventure to the Holy Lakes. Providing an uncomplicated escape from the city without the expense of mountain flights, this uncrowded track leads walkers alongside the Nagmati River, up past

Clockwise from right, Taman Negara's Canopy Walkway. Mist rises over Taman Negara. Surja Kund is the highest of Gosainkund's Holy Lakes. The author trekking beside Gosainkund's Holy Lakes.

terraced fields of hemp and grain into the lush rhododendron forests of Shivapuri National Park.

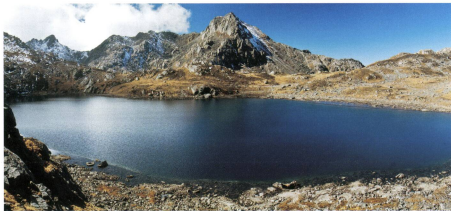
After a relatively easy half-day climb to Chisopani's string of welcoming ridgetop guesthouses, walkers face three days of strenuous ascents and slow descents through old growth chir pine and oak forests, beneath silver fir, deciduous larch and stands of thin, swaying bamboo where rare red pandas hide from view.

En route, simple lodges at Khutumsang, Tharepati and Phedi provide enormous serves of thick, hearty dhal bhat and spartan rooms with thin walls and mattresses, noisy rats, and toilets that seem desperately far away in the dead of night.

The trade-off for basic amenities are blissfully uncrowded tracks and incredible views from the high pass of Laurebina La at 4610 metres.

Across the pass, the stark, alpine landscape is immediately softened by white peaks, bright streams of Tibetan prayer flags and the deep, clear blue of Surja Kund, the highest of Gosainkund's Holy Lakes.

Perched on the edge of an immense, peacock blue lake containing what is said to be the head of Shiva turned to stone, Gosainkund is a sublimely beautiful spot.



It's well worth stopping for a few days before retracing your steps, continuing on to Langtang Valley or returning to spend more time on the other side of the Helambu Valley.

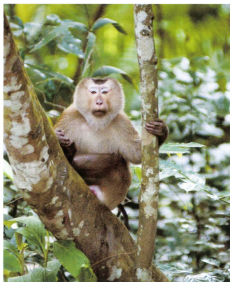
This suggested trek climbs more than 3000 metres (from 1400 metres to 4610 metres) so days on the track are limited by increases in altitude: Sundarjal to Chisopani – 4.5 hours; Chisopani to Kutumsang – six hours; Khutumsang to Tharepati – 4.75 hours; Tharepati to Phedi – four hours; Phedi to Gosainkund – 3.5 hours.

LOGISTICS: Trek during autumn (October to November) or colourful spring (March to April) when rhododendrons bloom. Pay fees to enter Shivapuri National Park (\$4) and Langtang National Park (\$15). Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya* is a useful guide. www.dnpwc.gov.np

BANGKOK:

KHAO YAI NATIONAL PARK

Deep inside Thailand's oldest jungle sanctuary, a white-handed gibbon swings through the canopy. On the forest floor I am surrounded by a lively troop of pig-tailed macaques who groom and fight and mate with abandon, distracting me from the sight I have walked all day to see. With my binoculars firmly fixed on the rare gibbon, I'm distracted too by a steady stream of leeches, inching their way up my



Clockwise from bottom left, a pit viper.

Curious macaques are commonly spotted in Khao Yai National Park. A waterfall in Khao Yai National Park. Khao Yai's observation towers make wildlife spotting easier. Exploring one of Khao Yai's many self-guided tracks.

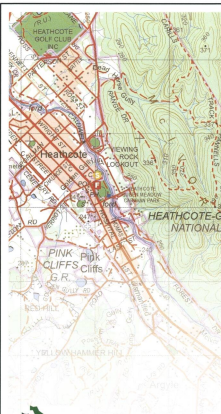
legs and completely ignoring the fact that I'm wearing supposedly leech-proof socks. In Thailand's first national park, you can't hope to catch sight of South-East Asia's remaining tigers, Asian elephants or sun bears without meeting the rest of the food chain too.

Accessible in less than three hours from Bangkok, this extraordinary wilderness protects more than 2000 square kilometres of grasslands, tropical moist evergreen forest and wild rivers that carve tracks through the Dong Phrayayen mountain range.

A dozen self-guided walking tracks (between two and ten kilometres in length) lead to animal observation towers, more than 22 waterfalls and climb to mountain lookouts with vast vistas over the park.

For day walks, purchase a guide from the park headquarters. Consider taking a local guide on overnight adventures and to increase your chances of spotting wildlife.

While tigers are rarely seen, those who stake out the park's salt licks frequently



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spot elephants, sambar, barking deer, civets, squirrels, wild pigs, porcupine and grazing quietly above, fantastic white-handed gibbons whose calls echo through the jungle.

LOGISTICS: Most visitors cover the 200 kilometres from Bangkok to Pak Chong by train. Enter nearby Khao Yai National Park on a day-long guided tour, hire a motorbike or ride a local bus to the park headquarters. Hire or BYO tent to overnight at one of three campgrounds or book a bungalow

(\$27–\$300/night) online at www.dnp.go.th/parkreserve. Meals are available and park entry costs around \$7/person.

HANOI: THE PERFUME PAGODA

Eerily lit by flickering candles, the darkened recesses of the Perfume Pagoda's massive 2000-year-old limestone cave entices travellers on an enchanting pilgrimage that ends deep inside Huong Tich Mountain – the Mountain of the

Fragrant Traces. Named for the wildflowers that scent the air each spring, the Perfume Pagoda is accessible in a day-long journey from Vietnam's capital Hanoi.

Travelling first by road, then river rowboat, walkers reach the base of the mountain to ascend a primitive foot track through immense craggy mountains and blades of rock that rise abruptly out of verdant rice paddies.

En route, this stone-paved path detours to striking temples, shrines and sanctuaries carved out of the limestone cliffs with names like 'Pagoda Leading to Heaven', 'The Heavenly Kitchen' and the 'Purgatorial Pagoda'. Each houses individual deities that the Vietnamese believe can cure suffering, provide children and purify souls.

It takes more than an hour to tackle the uphill climb to the Perfume Pagoda's dragon mouth cave opening where a staircase descends past ancient stalactites and stalagmites that have long since merged to form enormous limestone columns that span floor and ceiling.

Guided by torchlight, pilgrims make their way to highly decorated altars to place offerings of candles, incense and trinkets in the hope of attracting wealth, long life and babies.

In the darkest recesses of the cave, the largest and highest of all the alters is devoted to 'Tam Giao' or Triple Religion, the uniquely Vietnamese fusion of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian philosophies.

Believed by many to be the most beautiful of all Vietnamese pagodas, the Perfume Pagoda provides the perfect escape for travellers fatigued by densely populated and chaotic Hanoi. Pilgrims throng to the site between February and March after the Lunar New Year's Tet festival, so expect crowds.

The Perfume Pagoda is found deep inside the Mountain of the Fragrant Traces.



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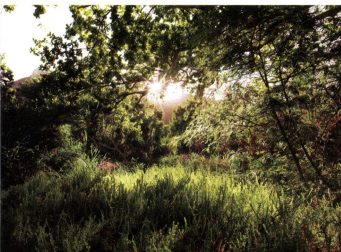
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LOGISTICS: Any hotel tour desk in Hanoi can arrange a trip to the Perfume Pagoda (including bus, boat, guide and lunch). Independent travellers can organise a car and driver, and board a rowboat to reach the foot of the mountain.

LIJIANG:

TIGER LEAPING GORGE

When protestors finally halted the damming of Southwest China's Yangtze River in 1997, they saved a spectacular river canyon, the homes of around 100,000 mainly Naxi residents, and preserved a unique walking experience.

Popular for its snow-clad mountain scenery and the chance it offers to overnight in authentic ethnic villages, the High Trail through Tiger Leaping Gorge promises solitude and space in a country where wilderness experiences are unusual, and rarely come without handrails and toll booths.

Winding its way beneath waterfalls and through pine and bamboo forests, the High Trail clings precariously to exposed cliffs that fall breathlessly into river rapids far below.

The world's third longest river, the Yangtze River or Jinsha Jiang as it is known at this point, surges between steep, narrow rock faces that rise abruptly for almost 4000 metres to the summits of Yue Long Snow Mountain (5596 metres) and Haba Snow Mountain (5396 metres).

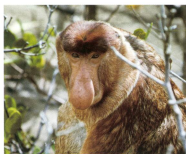
A walk along the High Trail is a leisurely, overnight adventure in the style of Nepal's teahouse treks, which means you can travel light and indulge in the terrific local hospitality offered along the way.

From Lijiang, one of China's best preserved fortified cities, take a two-hour bus ride to the village of Qiaotou where the walk begins. Local guesthouses dispense rough maps, and travel guidebooks to Southwest China include track notes that will equip you to handle the journey.

The High Trail's 22 kilometres are best spread over two days and village guesthouses are located about every two walking hours, providing reviving mugs of sweet rosebud tea and overwhelmingly warm hospitality.

We ended the first day of our trek at Nuoyu village, watching the sun disappear over the 13 stunning peaks of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and enjoying the twin pleasures of being high amongst the mountains, yet close enough to civilisation to enjoy an icy bottle of beer. A hearty dinner, drinks, hot shower and the cleanest bed we'd seen in China cost a tiny \$10 for two, the wonderful breakfast of freshly steamed buns with wild honey served gratis, despite our protests.

On day two, most walkers reach Walnut Grove by mid-afternoon, descending from the clouds to the river's edge to unwind in



Clockwise from above, Naxi village guesthouses in Tiger Leaping Gorge. Hiring a boat is the only way to reach Sarawak's Bako National Park. Wild's managing editor looking pensive.

sunny guesthouse courtyards that have a habit of delaying the return to Qiaotou.

LOGISTICS: A two-hour bus ride delivers trekkers to the trackhead above Qiaotou. Carry warm clothing and avoid the wet months of July and August when landslides and waterfalls can cut off the track.

KUCHING:

PRIMATE PATHS

Within easy reach of Kuching's bustling city centre, untouched pockets of genuine wilderness await discovery by those keen to walk jungle tracks. Accessible only by boat, Bako National Park is Sarawak's oldest, providing a beachside sanctuary for rare proboscis monkeys. Found only in Borneo, these elegant creatures feed on mangrove leaves by the sea, undeterred by the walkers who trek past en route to secluded swimming holes, waterfalls, jungle lookouts and remote beaches. Choose from 15 walks ranging from one to 17 hours.

The track to Bako's best beach climbs towering cliffs and passes carnivorous pitcher plants before dropping to Teluk Pandan Kecil, a perfect arc of white sand beach nestled in a clear blue bay (five kilometres return).

For views, tackle the stiff climb to Ulu Assum (three kilometres return) or find solitude beneath Tajor's waterfall and nearby beach (seven kilometres return).

Bako's basic facilities include a cluster of forest bungalows, campground and a very basic café, so if you are planning an overnight adventure, bring a stove, food and all camping gear.

To reach the park, take a taxi from Kuching to Bako village (\$14) where boats leave on demand for the short trip to the park (\$20 for up to five people). National park entry fees are \$4/person and campsites cost \$2.

Another favourite wildlife encounter takes place twice daily at Semengoh Nature Reserve, just outside Kuching. After following a park ranger into the rainforest, we stood mesmerised as orangutans appeared, shimmering hand-over-hand along vines and descending tree trunks to feed on a feast of tropical fruits at the feeding station.

One of only four sanctuaries that safeguard the world's largest tree-dwelling animals, Semengoh provides twice daily feeding sessions that are visited by up to 20 semi-wild orangutans released or born in the park over the past two decades.

Three-hour minivan tours depart Kuching's visitor centre twice daily (\$10), but visitors should be aware that orangutans may not visit during the forest's natural fruiting season.

LOGISTICS: It rains year-round in Sarawak, but falls are heaviest from November to February. Pack lightweight hiking boots, a well-ventilated tent, sleeping mat, stove, cooking gear and food, torch and insect repellent. sarawakforestry.com.

Catherine Lawson and David Bristow live to walk, sea kayak and snorkel some of Australia and the world's most distant wild places.

A Different Side to the Blue Mountains

Greg Powell outlines a series of spectacular walks through the remote and rarely visited Capertee and Wolgan valleys on the western side of the Blue Mountains

George Hardy was an 1800s pioneer sheep farmer in the Capertee Valley. He often drove his wagon into Lithgow to collect supplies for his isolated farm. On one occasion he was driving along the old road through Baal Bone Gap when he was bailed up by a bushranger who took a £5 note from him. Today, the valley is still sparsely populated and very isolated, but you are safe from bushranger attack. You will find plenty of history here, including the grave of George Hardy in the little cemetery deep in the valley at Glen Alice. The region is now attracting attention due to the fact that the Capertee Valley is the world's widest (but not deepest) enclosed canyon.

Together with its neighbour, the Wolgan Valley, many easily accessible walks are available that feel remote yet are influenced by the industrial history of the valleys.

Glen Davis was the dominant town in the Capertee. It owed its existence to the sedimentary rock called oil shale, which can be heated and refined to produce oil for petrol production. In the adjoining Wolgan Valley the township of Newnes was established in 1905 to mine and refine the shale. The oil from the shale was Australia's only source of petroleum for many years. In the late 1930s, the Newnes works were transferred to the Capertee Valley, just nine kilometres over the escarpment

to Glen Davis, but 110 kilometres by road. With war looming, a strong oil industry was needed and by 1939 the vertical retorts were in operation. As Glen Davis was located in an isolated corner of the huge canyon, a petrol pipeline was built over the sandstone escarpment to connect with the railway formation at Newnes. This solved the problem of transporting the petroleum out of the valley. This area is on the edge of one of Australia's largest and most spectacular wilderness areas, so you can plunge deeper into the heartland for days or enjoy the feeling of solitude on the boundaries for a few hours without too much effort.

ACCESS

The Gardens of Stone and Wollemi national parks surround the Capertee and Wolgan valleys. Spectacular views of the sandstone escarpments can be seen from the many drives and walks in the area. The Castlereagh Highway between Lithgow and Mudgee provides access to the valleys. Lithgow is about a one-hour drive from western Sydney. The Wolgan is entered by a winding unsealed road from Lidsdale, and the Capertee on mainly sealed roads from Capertee or Rylstone.

Monundilla Sector free map gives an excellent overview of the whole area. *Ben Bullen and Mount Morgan* 1:25 000 maps cover most of the walks. Books on the history of Newnes and Glen Davis are available in the area.

CAMPING

There are numerous car-based campsites that can be used as bases to explore the region further on foot. The free

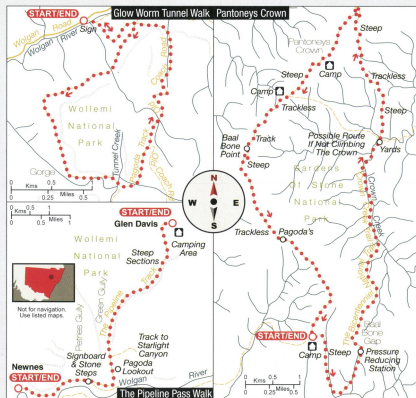
campground at Glen Davis is one of the best. It is located close to the old town yet is in a bushland setting. There is an excellent amenities block with hot showers, and locals who use the facility as a community centre open a kiosk there at weekends. Coorongooba is a free four-wheel drive access camping area down the Capertee River. Newnes has a free camping area with pit toilets. The old hotel opens at weekends as a kiosk.

SAFETY/WARNINGS

The top of the escarpment, which includes the plateau of Pantoneys Crown, is around the 1000 metre level and conditions can be cold, wet and windy, with winter snow a possibility. Even on day walks, irrespective of season, walkers should carry protective clothing for potential changes in the weather. Pantoneys Crown itself involves some rockclimbing and should only be tackled by experienced parties that are properly equipped. Water is scarce on the escarpment and clambering about in summer is not recommended. Mist and fog is common, which adds to the beauty of the surrounds but may hamper navigation.

MAPS

Most of the routes mentioned here are set walks (with signage often placed along the way) and brochures with maps are available. Parks brochures are available for Wollemi and Gardens of Stone national parks. The recently published Greater Blue Mountains –



The walks



THE WALKS

The Pipeline Pass Walk (Nine kilometres one way – five to six hours)

From Glen Davis, the Pipeline Track follows the old route of the ten centimetre diameter petrol pipe that crossed the divide into the Wolgan Valley at Newnes.

The walk can start at the camping area by crossing the small footbridge and following Yarool Street over the hill to a low white sign pointing left into the bush. The route climbs gradually, with some steep pinches, up into Green Gully, a very convenient pass through what at first appears to be an unbroken cliffline. The track is clearly defined and the pass is reached after three kilometres of climbing. A further two kilometres through the scenic ferny gorge leads to the top of the pass, the highest point of the walk at 800 metres. Spectacular views back over the route to the Capertee Valley can be obtained from rocky vantage points. A side track leads to the Starlight Canyon in the wilderness area.

The best is still to come, however, as less than a kilometre along the level track is Pagoda Lookout. Here you really know that you have crossed the range, as your view is now into the Wolgan Valley.

To continue on requires a steep 340-metre descent down a classic Blue Mountains rocky pass. The track then flattens out for the final few kilometres to Newnes campground. It is a long walk back to Glen Davis, so the whole walk is best done as a two-day trek, starting at Newnes and camping at Glen Davis. To only go as far as the lookout makes a worthwhile day walk from either end.

The dull black stones that you may see lying about are oil-shale. Pick some up and put them in the fire. Like the early pioneers of the area, you will discover that they quickly catch and burn, giving off a thick black oily smoke. The smell must have permeated the whole valley in the 1940s.

Climbing a boot-shaped rock near Baal Bone Gap in the Capertee Valley. All photos by David Noble

Glow Worm Tunnel Walk (Nine kilometres – three to four hours)

By 1907 a 51-kilometre railway line was built to link Newnes with the main western line. This railway involved the construction of two long tunnels and an S-shaped descent of the cliffines before the track could reach the valley floor. The mines are silent now and the railway tracks are gone. Only the level track formation and the tunnels, home to hundreds of glow worms, now remain. Walkers today will marvel at the engineering ability of men like Henry Deane and his team to build a railroad, through such inhospitable terrain, over 50 kilometres in length in just over 12 months. The track starts at a small signposted roadside car park about seven kilometres back from Newnes.

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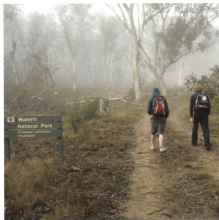


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Within a minute of walking, a concrete ford is encountered and boots usually need to come off. An information sign and map is located nearby, which reminds you to bring a torch for the tunnel traverse. After a steep climb a signposted junction of tracks is reached. The railway formation is now evident with the lefthand track descending to Newnes and the righthand way towards the tunnel. The track ahead is the Old Coach Road, which you will descend on the return trip. Your route is now along the almost level railroad. Cuttings, sleepers, culverts, retaining walls, bridges, washaways, landslides and the blasted and carved cliffline above will be constantly evident. You'll stand in awe at some places and wonder at how they managed to get a fully laden steam train through here. The route now swings into the canyon and heads for the tunnel. A variety of tracks take you through this prehistoric landscape of giant tree ferns and dripping water. Beyond an old bridge, framed by the trees of fern, the yawning mouth of the tunnel appears.

At first the light penetrates a long way but this is a curved tunnel and in the centre it is pitch dark. The dark central section is the best place to turn off the torch and observe the hundreds of blue-white dots of light emitted from the glow worms. Soon light will become evident from the eastern opening and you will emerge into a smaller ferny gorge, which gives way to open forest. A short walk will lead to the Pagoda Track on the left, which after a short steep climb connects to the Old Coach Road. The lower part of the track narrowly and spectacularly hugs the cliffline and emerges at the track junction that was noted on the way up. The whole circuit makes a leisurely day walk.



Pantoneys Crown (20 kilometres – 15 to 16 hours)

The mesa-shaped plateau of Pantoneys Crown dominates the Capertee Valley. A skirt of trees climbs steeply up the talus slope to the sandstone cliffline, which rises sheer, to the seemingly flat, scrubby summit at an elevation of just over 1000 metres. To climb to the summit is difficult and dangerous and should only be attempted if someone already knows the route and passes. You can design rim or valley walks to take advantage of the views of the ever-changing moods of the Crown without actually climbing it. Rough four-wheel drive roads head in to Baal Bone Gap from Ben Bullen or north of Lidsdale. At the Gap water is available from the pressure reducing station on

the water pipeline that runs all the way to the old shale mining town of Glen Davis. The view from the Gap is wild. Clifflines rise and disappear to both left and right and out in the centre of the valley stands Pantoneys Crown. It is easy to imagine this as bushranger country. Escarpment walks can lead off from here or follow the old road, which plunges steeply into the grassy flats of the valley floor, crossing the dry bed of Crown Creek many times. Rocky knife-edge spurs provide steep ascents

Clockwise from above, camping on Pantoneys Crown. Skirting cliffs on the summit of Pantoneys Crown. Heading off from Glen Davis on the Pipeline Walk. Greg Powell



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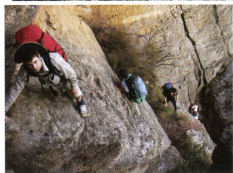
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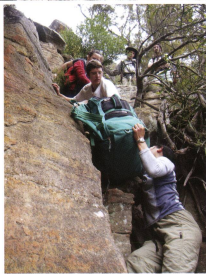
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Photo: Jared Jumping, Fitz Roy Range, Argentina Patagonia © Topher Donahue / Aurora



Clockwise from above, ascending the southern pass on to Pantoneys Crown. Walkers at Baal Bone Gap. The tricky descent from Pantoneys Crown.



to the flank of the Crown. Easy, open walking is enjoyed until the cliffline appears high above, and the talus skirt of the mountain demands a slower pace. Walkers pick their own routes through the obstacle course of boulders, rock ledges, spiky scrub and loose ground. At the northern tip the pass requires at least three locations where packs need to be hauled up on ropes. It is slow going and rockclimbing skills and gear are needed. The summit of Pantoneys Crown is

not flat, as distant appearances would indicate. It is really dissected by countless eroded pagodas of every shape and size. These towers of sandstone erode along horizontal layers of soft and hard strata and crossing them is like walking up and down endless staircases. The Crown is only 200 metres wide so on both flanks the valley views open up quickly. Ahead, the long rocky summit snakes south-west for over a kilometre and the usual campsite is near the end. All water must

be carried, as there is none to be found on the walk.

The descent pass is difficult to locate and the rope will be again needed for lowering packs and belaying people. This route has much scenic exposure.

For walkers just seeking views of the Crown, a pleasant dry campsite is located in the saddle between the Crown and Baal Bone Point.

Baal Bone Point is reached after a long slog up the spur track. The rope comes in handy again for the final ascent to the knife-edge ridge. Walkers should have a party member who is familiar with the pass. The ridge here is about a metre wide and as you come over the top, you stare down into the abyss on the other side. A trackless pagoda walk around the rim of the valley with the whole route laid out below, finishes a memorable weekend of classic bushwalking.

Greg Powell has recently retired from a 40-year teaching career. He lives at Lake Macquarie in NSW and will now have more time for walking and writing. He has written books on bushwalking and bushrangers and particularly enjoys walks with a historical flavour.



THE MOTHER OF ALL MONSTERS

Dr Steve Van Dyck on echidnas

It is hard to credit that the echidna and feral cat could share the limelight for anything truly notable. But they do, and, for this brief moment of recognition, one species is as respected for the achievement as the other is despised.

Like no other mammal on Australian soil, these two are found everywhere: six states, two territories, mountain snowfields to rainforests, gibber deserts to spinifex – all habitats are one big all-you-can-eat buffet. It's just a pity that, for the one who swallowed the canary, the menu isn't confined to ants.

Even so, for the other, who's swapped teeth for an 18-centimetre tongue, it must take a lofty threshold of boredom to tackle the prospect of stomaching nothing but ants every meal. No matter how you dress it up, the flavour of the day, every day, is going to be a little on the salt-and-vinegar side. Fortunately though, for the echidna's long suffering palate, variation on the ant-theme comes in the form of our multicoloured Australian dirts, clays, dusts and gravels, all indiscriminately caught up on that sticky licker. Because when you're hot, prickly, toothless and hungry, there is no easy way to separate ants from whatever surface they're being slurped off. While a bit overboard on minerals, to an echidna, five scoops of dirt to two of ants is as balanced as a monotreme meal can get.

And this is what makes echidna excrement distinctive, like a cross between a drilled geological core sample and a Street's Rainbow paddle pop. Long, smooth, two-centimetre-thick terracotta

extrusions in all shades of the sunburnt country that, when scorched and snapped, glisten with the black glitter of ant exoskeletons mashed up against the palate two days earlier. Two days might seem like a strangely slow digestion process for echidnas, given that many ants carry within their abdomen a chemical warfare bomb of formic acid, with the pH (2–3) of commercial paint stripper. You'd think this living two-pack of tissue and acid would almost digest itself when munched

roughly in an echidna's mouth, but the digestion process is slowed because the echidna's stomach never produces gastric acid and, at around pH 7.2, is nearly always neutral. By comparison, the pH in a normal human stomach (gastric acid, mostly hydrochloric) is an oh-so burning 1–2.

In fact the echidna doesn't only eat ants. It will nuzzle and mash up beetle larvae (anything we loosely call 'witchetty grubs') with its snout until the paste can be hoovered through its five millimetre (when fully-opened) mouth. So the real nuts and bolts of chemical breakdown in echidna digestion come with the first mucousy slurp on the tip of its tongue: enzyme-rich saliva, and buckets of it.

Long ago someone clever noted that if you were going to be an insect-eating mammal you either had to eat all sorts of crawling things and stay forever small, or grow larger but specialise on ants. The only way a big-bodied animal (aardvark, giant anteater, echidna) could find enough of what it needed was to eat social insects – networked friends without Facebook. That means ants, termites and, more importantly, nests bristling with them and their protein-rich eggs and larvae. And talk about unlimited food – the combined weight of the earth's ants apparently exceeds the combined weight of all humans! In grisly, prehistoric days 65 million years ago, it seemed that every second creature was a marauding reptile with a cavernous mouthful of chiseled tusks and an appetite like the Moura



Above and left, this handsome fellow was found wandering through Dryandra Woodland in Western Australia. Noeleen Proud



It must take a lofty threshold of boredom to tackle the prospect of stomaching nothing but ants every meal. No matter how you dress it up, the flavour of the day, every day, is going to be a little on the salt-and-vinegar side.

dragline. At that time, the only way to live beyond the cataclysmic meteor shower that amounted to D-Day for dinosaurs was to be of smaller stature and specialise your skills and eating habits. Fortunately for the world's only remaining egg-laying mammals, the platypus' ancestors stealthily slipped on duck beaks and paddle tails, diving for river tucker, while the echidnas' donned protective quills and eased into ant-eating. And in this vast, termite-infested continent, life has undeniably been on the echidna's side ever since. Four of about the 7469 things that puzzle me concerning echidnas though are: why are echidnas so abundant and easy to see in Tasmania, an island where no termites exist? Why aren't breached and plundered termite nests more commonly encountered on mainland bushwalks? In Australia, why are termites, such a ubiquitous resource, the favoured prey of just two mammals – echidnas and numbats? And lastly, why do we still call this national treasure an 'echidna'? Ah, some might say, we should be proud to continue calling it by its Indigenous name which means...um...?

But echidna is not Aboriginal for 'spines' or 'ant-lover' or 'good tucker' or anything. Echidna was the half-woman (mammal, milk producing)/half-snake (egg laying) demon who held the honour for being the 'Mother of all Monsters' in Greek mythology. It is reported that she 'ate men raw'. Once this appalling connection is made you could never criticise people who innocently call echidnas hedgehogs. The echidna is neither monstrous nor fearsome (nor for that matter half-woman), just prickly and confusing, but it has few natural enemies. So much confidence does it place in its rattly coat of sharpened skewers that it represents one of only two or three Australian mammals that actually operates (rather than shuts down) during the day.

It remains one of the easiest mammals for walkers to get close to. And with a little persuasion it will do disappearing acts and Houdini impersonations that will leave everyone gasping. Regardless of the substrate, a startled echidna will bury itself like a sinking ship. As naturalist Thomas Ward once put it, 'the head and shoulders are underground by the time an

active man can run a distance of thirty or forty yards,' (or an inactive man can fumble for his camera). Once below the Plimsoll Line, it resists forcible extraction with the tenacity of a Ramset bolt. In fact, to pull out a submerging echidna requires such an exertion of strength that you'd swear the animal would rip apart before yielding to the persuasion. As an escape artist, the echidna has no peers.

Very few naturalists haven't made the mistake of trying to hold an echidna in a box or a spare room for the night. An echidna might tend towards cringing introversion when held in human hands, but this masks a herculean capacity for destruction, set to be unleashed ten short minutes after being left alone. Lock an echidna in a room overnight and be prepared for furniture rearrangement on a scale to rival recent receding floodwaters. Its reputation for shifting refrigerators and peeling back Gyprock is no urban myth. Apart from the occasional prick, echidnas are harmless to handle. But beware. If you're tempted to kiss your catch before letting it go, don't forget you'll be puckering up to the Gene Simmons of tricky lickers. Unless you're into endoscopically deep and meaningful kisses, a careful pat on the head might be the most prudent way to send your charge trundling on its way.

Dr Steve Van Dyck is the Senior Curator of Vertebrates at the Queensland Museum and Wild's newest regular columnist.

Burn Baby Burn

Noelene Proud surveys lightweight stoves for bushwalking



The author cooking up a storm, Mt Magog, Stirling Ranges, Western Australia. Noelene Proud

It is difficult to single out my favourite thing about bushwalking, but a hot coffee on a crisp morning, brewed and savoured while enjoying the brilliant view from a warm sleeping bag is a contender. A close second is a hot meal after a cold, muddy day carrying a pack. A cooking system is an important part of not just fuelling the body but enjoying the walking experience. For most people cooking and eating are the main camp activities, so finding a stove that matches your needs is important. Different destinations and conditions often require different stoves, giving the gear geeks among us a (rare) legitimate reason to collect even more equipment.

This survey looks at stoves for multiday bushwalking. Although most bushwalking will not be at high altitude or in below freezing conditions, some of the stoves in this survey are suitable for use in both extreme and not-so-extreme walking environments. A number of intertwined factors are considered in choosing a stove for multiday walks.

DESTINATION AND FUEL AVAILABILITY

Whether the destination is around the corner or around the globe, fuel availability will dictate the choice of stove.

Fuel cannot be packed and taken on a plane so being able to obtain fuel at the walking destination is essential.

The expected weather conditions are another consideration. Generally, liquid fuels (for this survey, the term 'liquid fuel' excludes methylated spirits) outperform other fuels in freezing weather, which, together with fuel availability, is the reason most parties headings overseas to mountainous areas are equipped with multifuel, liquid fuel stoves. Very cold weather, starting a few degrees above zero, causes problems with gas canister stoves, as the pressure required to deliver fuel to burn falls as the temperature does. Methylated spirits does not burn as efficiently in freezing conditions.

Availability of compatible canister gas supplies need to be researched before setting out for the start of a bushwalk. Fuel for spirit or alcohol stoves, such as methylated spirits, is widely available in Australia and other western countries.

WEIGHT

Some stoves are much lighter than others but direct comparisons need to consider many things; some stoves have integrated pots (including saucepans that double as bowls to eat from), windshields, saucepans with handles (so the pot lifter

can be left at home) and saucepan lids (that can double as plates or frypans). Some stoves, especially integrated stoves like the Jetboil, use fuel more efficiently than other styles of stove, so extra weight needs to be balanced against the need for less fuel.

If walking with a friend or two, a stove with the firepower, saucepan supports and stability for a big pot is an option. This means stoves for two or more people are heavier but the weight is divided among the party.

If the same amount of cooking was done using all three fuels, the liquid fuel and gas required would weigh roughly the same, while the equivalent cooking power in metho is close to double the weight.

Fuel bottles for liquid fuel and metho are easily weighed (and easy to take just the required amount of fuel and estimate how much fuel is left). It is more difficult to take just the right amount of gas. The common 'middle size' gas canister holds about 220 grams of gas in a canister weighing about 140 grams. Weighing the canister after a trip to determine weight of gas used, and then deducted from the empty canister weight, is one way of calculating the weight of fuel required for future trips.

FUEL EFFICIENCY

Maybe I have too much time on my hands, but I have been taking photos of stoves with a thermal imaging camera to see which stoves lose the least heat. The images show the insulated cosies and flux rings of Jetboils direct nearly all the heat into boiling, not the surrounding air. Also very efficient with heat are Trangia models with the large windshields, multifuel stoves and the gas stoves designed for groups, especially when used with the included windshields.

Gas stoves with the stove sitting on top of the canister tend to lose some heat into the surrounding air. As it is important not to overheat the canister, instructions must be read regarding use of windshields with each model.

BOIL TIME

This can be important if you like a brew at lunchtime or need hot drinks quickly at the

end of a cold day. Depending on conditions, liquid fuels and gas boil in about the same time. Those brewing up with metho wait a few minutes longer. Liquid fuels such as shellite will be the fastest boilers at altitude or if it is very cold. Cold and wind impact on boil time and fuel efficiency, so cook in a sheltered spot, use a windshield if safe and put a lid on that watched pot.

DURABILITY

Stoves get jiggled around a lot – a stove that won't work when all you have is dehydrated food is not a lot of fun. As handy as the auto lighter is, always carry matches or a lighter. Metho stoves are simple and low tech, giving the advantage that not much can break or go wrong.

USEABILITY

Will the stove fold and pack away into a snug bundle for travelling? Is it easy to adjust the flame when a hot pot is on the stove? The ability to gently sauté fresh garlic and chilli in olive oil is essential for camp gourmets. A large burner head that spreads the heat output is better than applying a blowtorch to the bottom of the pot. Other bushwalkers crank up the heat, boil water, tip in bag, wait impatiently, then wolf down dinner. Gas is easy to adjust. Some liquid fuel stoves can get a simmer going, though it ranges from easy to impossible. Metho stoves are generally hard to adjust.

As the flare-up from priming liquid fuel stoves can be dangerous, it is important to practice fuelling, pressurising, priming (heating the burner so it is hot enough to vaporise the liquid fuel) before setting out. Jets may need to be changed for different fuels, another skill to practice beforehand.

The packed dimensions need to be considered with all cooking system components in mind; stoves in the survey with integrated saucepans have bigger dimensions, but all bushwalking parties will be packing a saucepan if taking a stove.

Stability is important as no one wants to see the eagerly awaited meal slide into the dirt and nor should anyone be around a precariously balanced pot of boiling water.

Noelene Proud has brewed coffee and rehydrated food on numerous stoves while walking in Western Australia, other states and further afield.

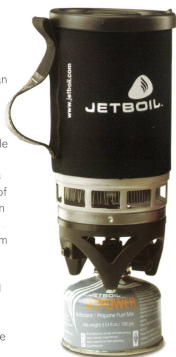


ELEMENTAL BY KOVEA TITANIUM RRP \$95

This gas stove has an auto ignitor and a long handle that makes it easy to adjust the flame. Like most gas stoves it boils quickly and has great simmer control. The folding pot supports allow it to pack small for travel. kovea.com

JETBOIL PERSONAL COOKING SYSTEM (PCS) RRP \$180

The PCS is a gas stove with an integrated saucepan sitting atop a flux ring (heat exchanger) and burner. The extra weight of the stove needs to be balanced against the increased fuel efficiency and the components included in the weight: saucepan, handle and windshield (in this case, a flux ring). The PCS has an ignitor and the woomph upon using it signals hot water is not far away, with a maximum capacity of 500 millilitres in any one boil. The neoprene cover on the pot increases fuel efficiency and protects hands from hot surfaces. Small gas canisters (the 100 gram size) fit inside the pot, along with the detachable burner, for travelling. Although it simmers well, the tall, narrow saucepan makes the Jetboil more suited to boiling water for hot drinks and food rehydration than cooking. The flux ring cover can be hard for smaller hands to remove although never seems to be a problem for man-sized hands. Jetboil.com



ELEMENTAL BY KOVEA MOONWALKER RRP \$120

The Moonwalker is designed for group use and has an easy to reach ignitor – even with a big saucepan on board – and great flame control. The stove has a small built-in windshield around the large burner head and will immediately re-ignite if the flame is blown out. The low profile fold out legs keep the stove stable, but take care not to lift the articulated legs while cooking. It folds down into a small package, thanks to folding legs and a flexible hose, and is held snugly inside a plastic container. Maybe the clever people at Kovea can design this into a cup or bowl.



SOTO MICRO REGULATOR RRP \$180

A gas stove with a difference. The inbuilt regulator helps keep the gas output constant, an advantage in cold conditions. The regulator doesn't increase the pressure but evenly regulates the flow of gas, making this an interesting stove to investigate if quicker boiling times on gas are required in temperatures near and below freezing. The handle used to adjust the gas flow has a different feel to others due to the regulator, but it is easy to use. Like other stoves with arms that can swing free when the stove is folded down for travel, take care to pack the stove so the arms are held snugly in place. They slide into place for cooking but one may fall out of place if handling the stove between courses.



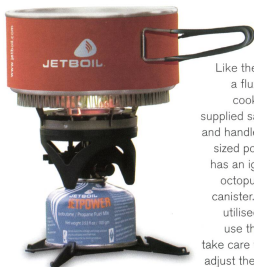
KATHMANDU BACKPACKER STOVE RRP \$120

This lightweight stove demonstrates the pros and cons of light gear versus bombproof; the handle to adjust flame is not as long as some and feels a little delicate when operating, while the arms of the pot supports are relatively short, requiring careful placement of the pot. Although the stove is very light the enclosed instructions recommend carrying it in the supplied storage case, which almost doubles the weight of the stove. The stove has the precise simmer and flame fine-tuning of other gas stoves. kathmandu.com.au



JETBOIL GROUP COOKING SYSTEM (GCS) RRP \$250

Like the Jetboil PCS this gas stove also uses a flux ring, but it has a larger saucepan for cooking for two or more. In addition to the supplied saucepan (which has a neoprene cover and handles that fold flat for travel), any suitably sized pot can be used on the stove. The stove has an igniter and a stabiliser – a three-armed octopus that fits on to the bottom of the gas canister. The pot lid and flux ring cover can be utilised as plates, with a third person able to use the saucepan. The camp cook needs to take care when reaching under the saucepan to adjust the flame and to centre the saucepan on the stove so it stays stable.



MSR XGK EX MSR RRP \$290

This liquid fuel stove has been proven over decades. Often referred to as 'the conversation killer', it's noisy when fired up so expect the usual comments regarding 747s clearing for landing. Large pot supports hold large saucepans for a hungry group and the ground-hugging legs keep the stove low and stable. A windshield and heat reflector (placed under the stove) are included with the stove. Minor jet clogging can be cleared by shaking the stove up and down. This is a great stove for cooking, although getting a simmer happening is difficult. As with all liquid fuel stoves, you usually get a little fuel on your hands when handling.



OPTIMUS NOVA RRP \$320

The Nova is a good simmerer for a multifuel stove. Crank it up and it gets noisy, but at least you know it is on. A windshield is included with this stove, which also has a very long handle for turning on and adjusting the flame. The attached caps for keeping dirt out of the fuel hose are a good feature. The legs and pot supports create a stable unit. The Nova comes with a maintenance tool that includes a magnet. This is slid under the burner and moved about to jiggle a needle to clear the nozzle. This clog-prevention method is easy to use but keep the magnet away from your compass.



**MSR WINDPRO RRP \$190**

A gas stove big enough to cook for a group. The big, steady legs and large pot supports make it unlikely that a hungry bushwalker will accidentally knock over a long-awaited meal. Cooking is made easier and faster by the easily reached flame adjustment on the canister, the very adjustable flame and the efficiencies created by the ground reflector and windshield. Windshield and heat reflector are included with the stove.

splean.com.au

SOTO MINI GAS STOVE RRP \$100

The only thing 'mini' about this gas canister stove is the small, solid unit it folds into for travel. Once opened it is a big, robust stove for one person. The pot supports are long and strong, creating a stable base for a saucepan. There is an ignitor and a long handle to adjust the very responsive flame, allowing just the right simmer. Despite the small burner head heat is evenly distributed while cooking.

sotooutdoors.com

**OPTIMUS SVEA RRP \$250**

A shellite burning brass stove that has been around for a century, making it a tried and true design. Big on both 'quaint' and weight, some practice is needed to use this classic cooker. The fuel canister forms the base of the stove and priming involves pouring a small amount of either shellite or metho into a shallow well on the canister (a tricky manoeuvre without an eyedropper). The whole stove gets hot once lit so care is needed to replace the windshield after priming and lighting. It takes practice to adjust the flame without holding the hot stove base or tipping the pot off the top. Pot supports swing out from the stove top to take saucepans larger than the included 300 millilitre pot. If you run out of shellite, expect Mallory and Irvine to step forward and gallantly offer more.

**SPARKS FLYING: TAKING STOVES ON PLANES**

When the first leg of an adventure is a trip to the airport, careful attention needs to be given to packing your stove, as used fuel bottles and alcohol fuel burners can create unneeded check-in counter dramas. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority's (CASA) rules state a camping stove can be carried in checked baggage (not as carry on) as long as you comply with the requirements for nullifying the danger from residual fuel. The CASA website has guidelines to achieve this. However, individual airlines still have the authority to refuse the carrying of a stove in your baggage. Long before departure date look up your airline's website for 'Dangerous goods' and comply with the regulations for carrying camping stoves. For each bushwalker that has never had a problem with stoves in baggage, there is another that has had to leave a much needed stove behind.

casa.gov.au

TRANGIA MULTI FUEL ADAPTOR RRP \$300

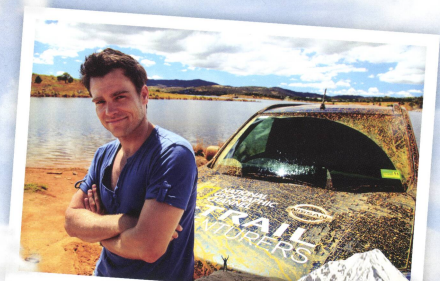
An accessory that converts a Trangia into a multifuel stove, with one burner able to use both gas and liquid fuels (metho can't be used with this accessory). The pack includes fuel bottle with pump, jets for different fuels and some maintenance gear. The multifuel adaptor creates a very versatile stove to use in all sorts of temperatures, places and altitudes. Gas is easy to connect and simmering is good, although flame control is not quite as precise as dedicated gas stoves. Play with different fuels at home as the middle of a storm is not the ideal place to work out the way to clear the fuel line to switch from liquid to gas – although it is simple. trangia.se



WANNA LIVE?



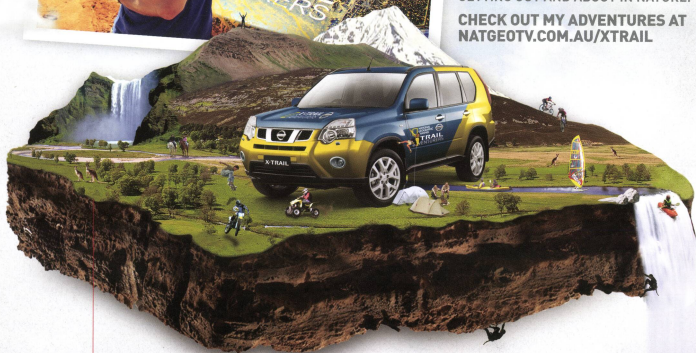
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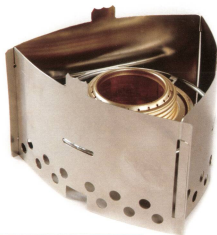
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TRANGIA 27 - 1 STORMCOOKER RRP \$140

A stalwart of bushwalking stoves, the Trangia is a package of both stove and cookware. A windshield, lid (can also be used as a frypan) and billy grips are included, and all these components need to be considered when looking at the weight. This is a bulky unit but all parts pack neatly to minimise bulk. Trangias are low tech so not much can go wrong. There is very little flame and heat control, though most people do not want to slow a Trangia down. There is a flame regulator but changing it mid-cook is a tricky affair. It also takes a little practice to put a Trangia out, usually done by dropping the burner lid in the precise place to smother the flame. Fuel performance drops when the temperature gets down to freezing.

**TRANGIA TRIANGLE RRP \$50**

The Transformer of bushwalking stoves, this flat package assembles into a triangle-shaped windshield with a burner in the middle, the pot sitting atop. The Trangia Triangle uses the alcohol burner, saucepans, lid and billy grip of other Trangia stoves but saves weight by using a much smaller windshield. The windshield-pot support is three interlocking panels and is stable, belying its appearance. The Triangle can be used with either the alcohol burner or a gas burner, a Trangia accessory.

BRAND AND MODEL	WEIGHT, GRAMS	FUEL	FUEL RECEPTACLE	HOSE	WEIGHT OF EMPTY FUEL RECEPTACLE, GRAMS	DIMENSIONS (MINIMUM), MILLIMETRES	MANUFACTURER'S BOIL TIME	PRICE, \$
elementAL by Kovea Titanium	88	G	Screw thread gas canister	No	140 (approx weight of empty 220g canister)	80 x 65 x 35	4.48 min for 1 litre	\$95
elementAL by Kovea Supalite titanium	60	G	As above	No	As above	73 x 65 x 32	4.32 min for 1 litre	\$90
elementAL by Kovea Moonwalker	291	G	As above	Yes	As above	90 x 80 x 115	4.56 min for 1 litre	\$120
Jetboil Personal Cooking System	408	G	As above	No	As above	104 x 104 x 180	2 mins for 500 millimetres	\$180
Jetboil Group Cooking System	535	G	As above	No	As above	175 x 175 x 110	4 mins for 1 litre	\$250
Kathmandu Backpacker Stove Titanium	47	G	As above	No	As above	55 x 55 x 75	3.30 mins for 1 litre	\$120
MSR XGK EX	390	S, K, U, D	Aluminium bottle	Yes	218 (650 millimetre bottle with pump)	130 x 160 x 115 approx	3.5 mins for 1 litre	\$290
MSR WindPro	193	G	Screw thread gas canister	Yes	140 (approx weight of empty 220g canister)	160 x 105 x 120 approx	4.25 mins for 1 litre	\$190
MSR PocketRocket	85	G	As above	No	As above	115 x 60 x 60	3.5 mins per 1 litre	\$85
Optimus Crux	90	G	As above	No	As above	84 x 57 x 31	Approx 3 min for 1 litre	\$110
Optimus Svea	550	S	Integrated in stove	No	N/A	100 x 100 x 130	7 min for 1 litre	\$250
Optimus Nova	415	S, K, U, D	Aluminium bottle	Yes	220 (600 millimetre fuel bottle with pump)	140 x 90 x 65	3.5 min for 1 litre	\$320
Soto Mini Gas Stove	160	G	Screw thread gas canister	No	140 (approx weight of empty 220g canister)	34 x 46 x 63	3 min, 54 sec for 1 litre	\$100
Soto Micro Regulator Stove	73	G	As above	No	As above	52 x 52 x 81	3 min, 54 sec for 1 litre	\$180
Trangia Multi fuel burner (use with Stormcooker)	825	G, S, P, K, U, D	Aluminium bottle	Yes	198 (600 millimetres)	180 x 180 x 95	8.5-10 mins for 1 litre (A), 3.30 mins (G)	\$300
Trangia Stormcooker 27-1	690	A	Brass burner	No	115 (500 millimetres)	180 x 180 x 95	8.5-10 mins for 1 litre (A)	\$140
Trangia Triangle	167	A, G	Brass burner (not included), screw thread gas canister	No	115 (500 millimetres)*	87 x 132 x 4	Not stated	\$50

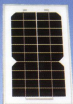
Fuel: Alcohol (methylated spirits), **Gas:** Shellite, Paraffin, Kerosene, Diesel **Unloaded petrol** **Boiling time:** This varies in the field according to weather, altitude, fuel and other factors. This specification and others related to performance used manufacturer's choice of fuel and the blend of gas.

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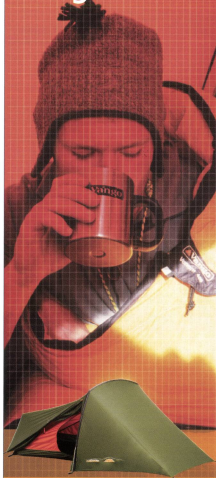
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Wild Diary

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Wild Women on Top
Sydney Coastrek BR
4-5 March, NSW
www.coolrunning.com.au

Tough Bloke Challenge

BR
5 March, Vic
www.maxadventure.com.au

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R

6 March, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

Six Foot Track BR

12 March, NSW
www.aura.asn.au

Kathmandu Adventure

Race M
19 March, Qld
www.maxadventure.com.au

6 hr Rogaine R

19 March, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Alpine Challenge BR

19-21 March, Vic
www.aura.asn.au

Water World BR

20 March, NSW
www.aura.asn.au

April

Paddy Pallin Adventure

Race Series M
2 April, NSW
www.adventurerace.com.au

Marysville to Melbourne

Multisport Challenge M
10 April, Vic
www.rapidascend.com.au

Autumn 12 hr R

16 April, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Autumn 24 hr R

16-17, NSW
www.rogaine.asn.au

6/12 hr R

30 April, Vic
www.aura.asn.au

Wildendurance BR

30 April-1 May, NSW
www.coolrunning.com.au

May

State Championships

12/24 hr R
14-15 May, SA
www.rogaine.asn.au

State Championships

8/24 hr R
14-15 May, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

The North Face 100 BR

14-15 May, NSW
www.ancosport.com.au

Kathmandu Adventure

Sprint M
21 May, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

8/24 hr R

28-29 May, Vic
www.rogaine.asn.au

Australian Mountain

Running Championships
BR
29 May, Qld
www.coolrunning.com.au

June

Southern Grampians

Hike Serra Terror II BR
10-13 June
www.dunkeldadventure.com

Oxfam Trailwalker

Brisbane BR
17-19, Qld
www2.oxfam.org.au

6/12 hr R

18 June, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

Bush Rogaine 6 hr R

18 June, SA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Winter 24 hr R

18-19 June, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R

19 June, NSW
www.rogaine.asn.au

July

Tough Bloke Challenge

M
2 July, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

Tough Bloke Challenge M

3 July, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

Bush Capital Bush

Marathon Festival
30 July, ACT
www.coolrunning.com.au

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running, M multisports,
P paddling, R
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I'm warm, come save me!

Names are important; **Ultimate Survival Technologies** have chosen a great one. They also know the power of a good acronym and have proven it with the release of the **BASE Kit**. Basic Adventure Survival Essentials Kit. Though the emphasis is on the basic, the kit is a combination of ingenious and potentially lifesaving devices. Stay warm and dry with an all-weather fire starter and a tinder cube that actually works better when it's wet, and attract the attention of rescuers with a signal mirror and whistle that blasts to a jet engine-loud 122 decibels. And at 68 grams it's so light you won't even know you're wearing it! RRP \$69.99 zenimports.com.au

Cure Baby Having

Baby management stopping your outdoors pursuits? Take the little tyke with you! And as all new parents want only the best for junior(ess), **Little Life** have topped the top of the range with the **S2 baby carrier**. There are too many features to list, but this puppy is anatomically designed for the comfort of both child and beast of burden. It's got top loops and reflective piping, an insulated bottle pocket and a canopy to ward off sun and showers. Babies should be portable after all. RRP \$439.95 expeditionequipment.com.au



You Suck (no more)!

No more sucking and no more sloshing. This is the promise of the **Geigerrig Rig 700 Blue hydration pack**. Firstly, this puppy is pressurised so the water comes to you, a little bite or squeeze on the nozzle and out it pours under its own locomotion. Perfect for sharing without contracting girl/boy germs, you can spray water into your companions' mouths. And as an added bonus, backwash is a thing of the past. Secondly, the water in normal hydration packs suffers from sloshing around in an unbalanced and annoying manner. The Geigerrig combats this by ensuring the two chambers that comprise the bladder are constantly under pressure. The Geigerrig – funny name, brilliant idea. RRP \$196.90 zenimports.com.au

Turn water into...water

Whether you're drinking from a tap in the back blocks of Delhi or an iffy creek in Queensland, the **My Bottle Purifier** will protect your belly from unwanted beasts. The plated fibreglass pre-filter removes bacteria and protozoa and particles greater than 0.3 microns while a three-layer electrokinetic filter zaps viruses and the smallest particles. Handily it needs no chemicals or batteries and has a cartridge life counter so you know when you are nearing the end of the 100 litre lifespan. Despite weighing only 260 grams it can hold 560 millilitres of water. The My Bottle is a good option for low-volume, portable purification. RRP \$119.95 katadyn.com



Landfoul

Butane canister stoves are convenient, too bad disposing of the canister responsibly isn't. **Jetboil** have addressed the restrictions that hamper attempts to recycle their canisters by releasing the powerfully named **Crunchit!** Still pressurised canisters are a no no in your recycling bin so Jetboil came up with a device to puncture them, rendering them safe for regular household recycling. Handily clipping to either a krab or a key ring, there's no excuse for sending canisters to landfill any longer. RRP \$9.95 seatosummit.com.au

(Don't) Get Lost

Conspiracy theorists warn us the satellites are always watching, so you might as well take advantage of it. The **Holux Funtrek** handheld GPS is designed to perform during all manner of outdoor adventures – being shock and water-resistant it can take a bit of a beating – and the 7.5 centimetre colour screen is large and bright. What you also want from a GPS is ease of use and the plug-and-play Memory Map connectivity accepts Topo4GPS micro SD cards and interfaces easily with PCs. Now you can always know where the bloody hell you are. RRP \$349.95 (\$629 with map software) spelean.com.au



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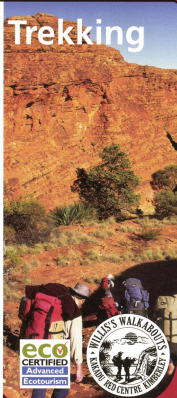
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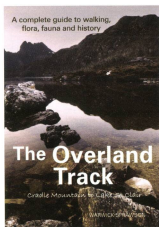


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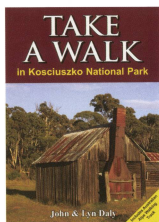
THE OVERLAND TRACK

BY WARWICK SPRAWSON (RED DOG BOOKS, 2010, RRP \$39.99, OVERLANDTRACK.NET.AU)

The Overland Track: Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair is the latest walking guide devoted to Australia's most famous multiday track. The guide, which has clearly been a labour of love for regular *Wild* contributor and author Warwick Sprawson, is a good addition to the Overland genre. Apart from the track notes to the walk (which are excellent and include all the sidetrips that make the Overland so special), it has a few

aspects that distinguish it from other guides. Firstly, it has many interesting sections on Overland-related history and pre-history, but best of all it has extensive information on local flora and fauna. While this may sound like it is all a bit heavy to carry, the guide is actually very compact (it weighs 280 grams), and would make excellent rainy day reading. It also comes with a good map in the back. For anyone who is keen to learn more as they walk the Overland this guide would make a great companion.

Ross Taylor



TAKE A WALK IN KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

BY JOHN AND LYN DALY (TAKE A WALK, 2010, RRP \$34.95, TAKEAWALK.COM.AU)

Take A Walk in Kosciuszko National Park is the tenth guide by the irrepressible duo of John and Lyn Daly. For those used to the Take A Walk guides, this one follows the usual user-friendly format: good maps, concise descriptions, gradient profiles, excellent photos and interesting tidbits of information with regards to history and native flora and fauna. The guide includes a good range of walks, from short and easy

day walks to hard multiday trips. It also has track notes to one of the longest walks in the land, the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT), which means the guide also covers some walking outside of Kosciuszko National Park and down into Victoria. A few walkers have gotten into trouble on the AAWT since fires have affected the track, but the Daly's have re-walked all fire-affected sections so the notes should be current. With 1400 kilometres of walking described, this guide should have something for everyone.

Ross Taylor

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Nick McKim

I was born in London and came to Hobart when I was five. Like a lot of people it was my parents who introduced me to the outdoors. They were keen campers and we did the occasional walk, but it wasn't until high school that I really got into bushwalking. By my late teens I was spending as much time as I could in the bush, including walking the South Coast Track, Frenchmans Cap and a few other relatively serious trips.

It is hard to be in those environments and not be moved by their majesty and splendour, and that's what started me on my political path. In the mid-1980s I was involved in the Farmhouse Creek Blockade and I was arrested while trying to protect our magnificent forests from clear-felling – an issue that we are still struggling to resolve at the moment. It was at Farmhouse Creek that I first met Bob Brown, whom I still consider a role model and friend.

It wasn't long after Farmhouse Creek that I left Tassie to travel for a while, working mainly on farms in Europe before returning to work as a wilderness guide for three seasons in Tasmania. Although it was walking for someone else, I had a memorable time taking folk out bush who ordinarily wouldn't get to experience the wilderness, letting them feel the majesty of Tasmania's wild places. I did the Overland Track more than a dozen times; you get quite intimately acquainted with your surroundings after spending so much time in them. After doing so much walking my knees began to get a bit worn out, so I decided to give up guiding and save bushwalking for myself.

My next job was in advertising and it was responsible for my reengagement with the Greens. I was approached by someone in Bob Brown's office and ended up working on his 2001 federal campaign. I was asked a couple of times to throw my hat in the ring for pre-selection for the Tasmanian State Election in 2002.

I said no a number of times, but Bob can be quite persistent, and here I am today: Australia's first Green Minister. It has been mostly enjoyable and always challenging, but I am now able to implement more Green policy ideas through my position in cabinet and through direct authority in Government agencies. We have an in-principle agreement regarding Tasmania's old-growth forests; after beginning this path all that time ago at Farmhouse Creek, I would dearly love to be a part of that resolution and see our beautiful native forests protected.

I find wilderness calming and centring. In the bush all the things that occupy my mind on a day to day basis ebb away. It's almost a Zen experience, you can just appreciate and immerse yourself in the wonder of the world.

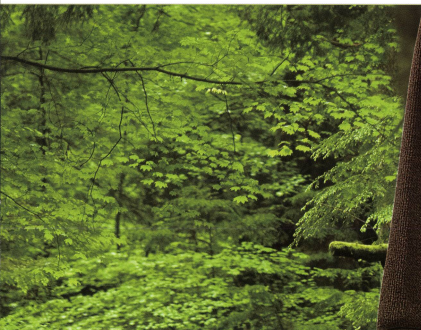
I haven't done any serious bushwalking for a few years now – politics doesn't leave a lot of time for that, but I still get out on day walks as often as I can. Luckily here in Hobart you can snatch some time in the bush on Mt Wellington, just 15 minutes from the centre of town. Ideally I prefer a couple of days to feel fully immersed in the bush, but I will take whatever I can get. These days that is mainly mountain biking on the tracks around Mt Wellington, which is both refreshing and exhilarating.

Interview and photo Craig Ingram





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